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On BOARD the BEATIC

ANNA CHAPIN RAY



ON BOARD THE BEATIC

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TILDEN FOUNDATIONS
R L



*He settled himself deliberately on top of the
rugs abandoned by Mrs. General.*

FRONTISPIECE. See page 40.

1913

1913

ANNALS

OF THE

ROYAL SOCIETY

WITH PROCEEDINGS BY
EDMUND FREDERICK

BOSTON

J. E. BROWN, AND COMPANY

1913

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ON BOARD THE BEATIC

BY

ANNA CHAPIN RAY

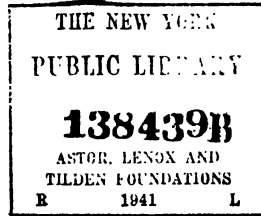
AUTHOR OF "A WOMAN WITH A PURPOSE,"
"THE BRENTONS," "OVER THE QUICKSANDS," ETC.

WITH FRONTISPIECE BY
EDMUND FREDERICK

BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY

1913

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ON BOARD THE BEATIC

CHAPTER ONE

CARL CLODE turned his back to the rail, and let his glance travel idly, indifferently up and down the deck. The harbour views were too familiar to have much significance for him. The crowd of stranger faces clustered at the rail held far more of interest.

He sorted them ruthlessly, however, ruthlessly decided that they were the usual thing one meets in waning summer on every hand in prosperous surroundings: the few whose position was too assured to let them care that they were unfashionably late in crossing, the many to whom the lateness resulted from the leanness of the family purse. For the rest, Clode's recent experience of ocean travel had been too narrow to allow him to do much detailed predicting. He had been over to Europe, quite as a matter of course, directly he was out of college. In the fifteen years and more since then, he had been too busy making money to have had much time for spending, too busy developing the luxuries of civilization to have had much energy for hunting down its arts.

However, like most rich bachelors of middle years, Clode had had time to learn to know his fellow beings and their habits as concerned himself. Therefore his glance was studiously indifferent, as it travelled

up and down the deck. At least, he had no acquaintances on board. For so much he believed that he was duly thankful. And he was seated at the doctor's table. That gave a chance for some good talk and, considering the age and nationality of the doctor, minimized the probability of being offered up, a victim to unsought and irresponsible flirtation.

Clode's eyes narrowed and his lips shaped themselves to a silent whistling as he watched the groups before him. To all appearing, he was the only single item on the passenger list. The others all were units of some group or other; all, that is, with the possible exception of a tall, good-looking man in a black necktie and with a black band barring his sleeve. Clode, who was neither tall nor good-looking, and who objected strenuously to mourning garments, disliked the man on sight. He was too consciously spectacular in his woe; and yet he was confoundedly well set up, confoundedly well worth the watching. Clode's eyes turned from him with an effort, and fixed themselves on a group of palpable Sedalians, west-side Sedalians, hearty, snub-nosed men, women whose foulard frocks alternately ballooned and clung close about them, children a thought too strident to suit Clode's taste. And yet, they were so happy, so uncritical, so determined to regard all things from the blond deck steward to the passing Coney Island steamer as being prepared for their own individual delectation. And it was interesting to imagine the mental processes of adults who felt inspired to wave their handkerchiefs at the excursion boat just landing at Liberty's feet, and then to salute Liberty herself, half humorously, half in fond farewell. Clode's eyes nar-

... V N

rowed; but a kindly little smile lurked within them, a smile that spread to his lips and broadened there, when he beheld the manifest disdain with which his bereaved fellow-passenger looked down upon their antics.

But the wind was dead ahead, and the heavy smoke trails from the two huge funnels of the ship *Beatic* were striping the blue noon sky, and settling down to blot out the receding city, far astern. Clode's eyes followed the smoke trails wistfully; then he allowed the smoke to have its way. This physical obliteration of the land he left behind was a fitting symbol of all he hoped the trip would do for him. His choice of the way he should spend his holiday had been in no sense the result of chance. Struggle and consequent success had left their mark upon him; he was tired, tired. And America held scanty rest for such as he. Impossible to forget what he had done, what he still planned to do, so long as newspapers lived upon their advertising matter, so long as railway roadbeds were bordered with gaudy hoardings, too many of them headed with his name. But names largely owe their familiarity to certain expected combinations. By the simple dropping out of two initials, Clode's own had ceased to bear any significance to his fellows who read it on their lists, although, in its congenital form, it would have set half an hundred pairs of eyes to hunting him out from among his mates.

He found his present inconspicuousness, the disregard he met on every hand: he found this rather restful. And yet, he asked himself a bit impatiently, did personality count for nothing, after all? Then

he laughed at his own inconsistency. What a colossal egoist he was! Only a most uncomfortably salient personality could focus upon itself the attention of the groups about him, groups far too intent on getting a last glimpse of the shores which stood to them as home to care much for any human individual, least of all for the prosaic, sturdy figure leaning with his back against the rail.

Nevertheless, it was precisely this figure, or, more especially, the smile, and not the receding shores amid the smoke trails that caught the attention of Miss Aileen Warburton, as she halted in the open doorway leading out to the wide boat deck where, for the most part, the entire ship's company were gathered. Not that for one single instant did she allow Clode to be aware of her attention, however. Aileen Warburton had been too well trained for that; moreover, she was from a New England city, and, by consequence, a mortal foe to making chance acquaintances. Her glance went over Clode; then it passed through him, as if he were a sheet of isinglass. A more self-distrustful man than Clode would have felt himself aggrieved by her palpable ignoring. Clode resented it. Little as he cared for the society of women, he cared still less for being ignored by them. His quiet gaze, resting full upon her for a moment, then dropping away again, made no secret of his swift antagonism. He gained no small amount of satisfaction, just as his glance was moving onward, from a sudden answering gleam of antagonism that shot across at him out of the dark grey eyes beneath their yellow lashes.

The gleam veiled itself immediately, and the lips

curled into a smile, as the deck steward came striding forward, in eager recognition. Recognizing Miss Aileen Warburton, the eagerness appeared to become a matter of course. Not all the other passengers, coming aboard, that August noon, could show a total of one-half so many salutes, accompanied by an equal number of radiant smiles, as did she. She accepted them with a composure which showed she was accustomed to them; but nothing in her graciousness could be construed into indicating that she took them as her natural prerogative. That was the charm of Aileen Warburton. Some women go through life in a perpetual state of wonder at the spontaneous friendliness which greets them from every hand. Only when it is withheld from them do they betray the fact that they have learned to await it, as theirs by natural and inalienable right.

She accepted, then, the attentions of the deck steward with a discreet indifference that was mingled with a deprecating gratitude. None the less, Clode, watching, shrugged his shoulders.

"Spoiled beauty!" he said tersely to himself. Then he stuck his fists into his pockets and strolled idly forward, following the direction of the ship which was just setting her nose southeastward into Ambrose Channel.

The antagonism in the grey eyes changed into swift amusement. Without turning a second glance in his direction, Aileen Warburton had been completely aware of the manner of Clode's exit. The sturdy little back and the aggressive poise of the ash-grey head had been more eloquent than their owner was conscious; and Aileen's past experiences

had rendered her an adept at reading out men's moods. Then she turned to the waiting steward.

"Here, you say? That is an ideal place. And my maid will bring you my rugs." Her quick eye took in the details of the deck, took in the reading light just above her chair. "You could n't have placed me better, steward. What am I to have for neighbours?"

"You have friends on board?"

She shook her head.

"Not a soul. And there 's not a name on the list I ever heard before. You see," her smile seemed taking him into the heart of her confidence; "I am new to this line, and quite at your mercy."

His smile was as honestly capable as hers was mock appealing.

"I'll do my best for you, Miss Warburton. It 's like the old days on the *Carmania*, to find you here." He studied his note-book for a minute. "I'll fix you up, all right. You have your seat at table?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I am leaving it all to chance," she told him. "Among total strangers, it is the only thing to do."

Two hours later, though, she changed her mind. It was in a mood of violent antipathy to chance that she sought out the second steward. Nevertheless, her courage well-nigh failed her, on her way downstairs. It was so un-nice, she told herself, so very middle-class to be launching out into objections, directly she was afloat. Besides, it was bound to focus attention on herself; and attention was the one thing Aileen Warburton believed that she ought to be desirous of avoiding at almost any cost.

Thirty-two years old, and closely followed by her maid, Aileen Warburton had felt singularly untrammelled, singularly emancipated, as she had come out on deck, that noon, singularly as if she had kicked over the traces and started to bolt. It was not at all according to her home and family traditions for a pretty young woman to set out for Europe with no other protection than a buxom maid. The voyage itself presented no difficulties, of course; she had crossed too often to have any doubts upon that score. The danger lay in the minds, and hearts, of her fellow-passengers. However, no one that she knew, was crossing so late in the season; her friends were of the orthodox kind who migrate eastward in late April and early May. A sudden whim, though, coupled with some unexpected invitations, had led her to book on the *Beatic*, only a day or two before; and, despite the ill-suppressed objections of her family, she had come on board, that noon, supported only by her buxom maid, her firm will, and her equally firm intention to make herself a totally inconspicuous unit in the more or less commonplace tide of August tourists. As well might a golden-crested cockatoo seek inconspicuousness among a crowd of English sparrows!

Not that Aileen phrased the truth to herself in any such downright terms as that. She merely was aware, as she came slowly up the stairs and out on deck, that heads were turned in her direction, that appraising feminine eyes and admiring masculine ones were following her. She could feign indifference; but, being altogether human, she could not feel it. She did feel, however, a devout thankfulness

that Marie, close at her heels, was a palpable fifty, and had had smallpox too long ago to have been properly enamelled.

To the eyes of Aileen's fellow-passengers, Marie was an asset, an important asset, in the sum total of Miss Warburton's appearance. She was so dignified and austere, so conspicuously proper, that she added ten-fold to the general noticeableness. Still, in any case, Aileen Warburton could not long have escaped attention. She was too tall for that, too prosperous; above all, she was too pretty. Her yellow hair and dark grey eyes, eyes where the flashes and the laughter came and went in swift succession, hair tawny yellow and breaking into all manner of little quirks and curls and ripples, hair that is at its best on shipboard and tumbled by a salty gale: these alone would have been enough, even had it not been for the flexible scarlet lips and the firm round chin which betrayed the fact that its owner possessed a will of her own, and that no pliant one.

Nothing could have been more demure than Miss Warburton's bearing, unless it was Miss Warburton's costume: coat and skirt and gull-winged toque of softest, palest grey; but, in both cases, the demureness was all upon the surface. Severity of cut and colour and of line can be pushed to a point that amounts to the extreme of skittishness; and Miss Warburton's tailor was an artist in his way. Against the billowing foulards of the eager Sedalians, his handiwork stood out, crying as stridently for attention as if it had been Joseph's coat of many colours; and the studied unconsciousness of its wearer helped to intensify the general impression. That the im-

pression was general was proved conclusively by the little shock that struck upon Miss Warburton's brain when she met the eyes of Clode, the sole exception.

At luncheon, the shock had been repeated, when she passed Clode's table; but the memory of it had vanished before the succeeding shocks which had bowled her over, during luncheon. In fact, luncheon ended, she realized the probable emotions of one of the self-righting toys after it has been in the hands of a lusty child of a mechanical turn of mind. She felt as if all her possibilities of permanent upsetment had been tried out to a finish. Hereafter, she could rely upon her ability to right herself after any reversal of her customary poise.

It was the process of righting herself that sent her down, just before teatime, to have a conference with the second steward. It did not suit her in the least to find Clode also there, awaiting conference. Neither did it suit her to have him waive his turn in her favour. Social blessings never gain in value by impersonality. Clode's deferential bow, as he stepped aside out of the waiting line, might have been aimed at a circus-rider, a countess, or a charwoman. None the less, the red dyed his cheek bones, at the quality of the nod with which Miss Aileen Warburton acknowledged his politeness. Only a moment later, her own colour would have risen, could she have watched the smile with which he listened to her colloquy with the patient steward. It was not Aileen's fault that she invariably had the air of taking corporation underlings into her confidence. Neither was it Clode's fault altogether that he con-

demned her as a spoiled coquette. It takes a few years' perspective to understand most people.

"I am so sorry to be troublesome," she was saying, with a feigned contrition that was crossed with mirth; "but one must draw the line somewhere. In travelling, one has to put up with all sorts — but one or two."

Her dash was eloquent; but not one-half so persuasive as the dimple at the left-hand corner of her lips. The second steward forgot his weary efforts to give the best seat in the room to each of the hundred passengers. He became humanly curious.

"And this one? Really, I did n't notice where you were, Miss —"

"Number Sixty-seven," she assured him, with a smile that was totally unconscious of the little start with which Clode, just behind her, received her introduction of herself; "otherwise, Miss Warburton. I was at a table in the corner, alone in the society of a —" She paused, searching the expressive and, at the same time, the unobjectionable, word.

"A —?"

Swiftly she coined her word, after the fashion of Edward Lear.

"A Megabelous Pikelpophagus," she said quite calmly.

The second steward did not know Lear. Wherefore, —

"Oh!" he said.

Miss Aileen Warburton glanced at him through her thick yellow lashes. While she glanced, she wondered if her ears had deceived her into thinking she had heard a smothered chuckle from over her left

shoulder. She dropped her voice a little, next time she spoke.

"How did he — did he show it?" the second steward was inquiring rather dubiously.

Miss Aileen Warburton forgot all other emotions in a swift wave of disgusted memory.

"By asking for mustard pickles with a *foie gras* in aspic, and by eating them out of the main dish with his fork." She shuddered. "Really, I can't," she added, too despairingly to explain her own elision.

But the second steward understood.

"You ought n't. I'll see he has a table to himself."

Her face fell.

"But about me?"

"I'll see that no one else is put there in his place."

She tried to smile in gratitude at his plan for her approaching isolation; but her smile faded and, with it, her haughty theories in regard to keeping to herself. Three, six, nine — it was a slow ship — twenty-two meals in a magnificent solitude! Her spirit quailed at the prospect of such boredom.

"Really, I should die," she told him simply.

In the end, it was Miss Warburton, not the second steward, who arranged the matter, bending above the charted board and sorting pins and labels to her liking. A largish table, six at least. And an elderly married couple at the end. She would sit opposite the wife, not next to her. It would be easier to talk. For the rest of the table — and her dimple showed itself again — something not too unmitigatedly feminine. It was best to have things balanced, if one

really cared about the talk. Thanks, yes. Eighty-nine was perfect. It was so good to change. And, the last she had seen of her table-mate at luncheon, he had come out on deck and removed his boots, preparatory to an afternoon nap in his deck chair. No. Mercifully it was in the front row, and quite at the far end. And, nodding her thanks, she gathered up her small belongings and turned to leave the room. On the way, she passed Clode by, with no more seeming consciousness than she had given to the table, just behind.

CHAPTER TWO

"YES. Who does n't?" Miss Aileen Warburton replied, over the soup that night. "Of course, I can't keep score; higher mathematics are beyond me. Still, I know enough to follow suit, and to make the least impossible thing into a trump. The rest I leave upon the knees of Providence."

Her left-hand neighbour took a sudden plunge into the talk.

"And does Providence—"

"Always," Miss Warburton answered swiftly, without awaiting the finish of the question. "Else, I should n't keep on playing." And, as she spoke, she turned to look at her neighbour more directly than, up to that moment, she had felt justified in doing.

Aileen Warburton's maid was deft and quick. Aileen Warburton's toilette, that night, looked very simple. Nevertheless, she had been one of the latest comers in the dining-room. There had been an instant's hush, as she came inside the doorway. An undesirable number of women were still in the deck clothes they had worn all day; and Aileen's plain white crepe gown, conveying its own subtle rebuke for their carelessness, roused their antagonism. Aileen felt their antagonism, and took quick and grateful note of the fact that the white-haired matron opposite was dressed conventionally, that three of the

four men at the table were in proper costume for the place and hour. The other two people, at the end of the table, seemed to her negligible quantities.

Of the properly accoutred men, one, the one across the table from her, wore an air of stolid unconcern which might proceed from the boredom of sated celebrity, or from a grim determination to make no radical errors in a first flight into high society. The briefest possible scrutiny caused Aileen to dismiss him, too, as totally negligible. The other man, the one at her left elbow, was more problematic. A hasty sidelong glance, as she sat down, assured her that he was the owner of the deck chair just in front of her own, the person she had been watching idly, half the afternoon. Stanway, she had made out the name upon his rug, and upon the cover of the yellow book open across his knee. The book was a volume of Maeterlinck, she noticed; she noticed, too, that his interest in it seemed a bit perfunctory, was more than a bit intermittent. But what could one expect of a man who carried his woe into his steamer rug and into the least details of his haberdashery? It must have cost him many an hour of anxious pondering to find out so many ways of proclaiming to an unresponsive world that he lately had been left a widower. Converted to a sandwich man and labelled, "Hands off! Inconsolable!" he could have done no more to advertise his need for feminine compassion. It was with a sense of positive relief that Aileen turned to her other neighbour, grey-headed, florid, bearing the unmistakable hallmark of being Somebody who had done Something or other, and to his white-haired, well-groomed wife who showed just as

plainly that she had been Somebody's chosen companion, while the Something was going on.

It had been the wife, quite naturally, who had spoken first and in plain platitude. It was wonderful weather for the sea. Had Aileen ever crossed on the *Beatic* before? It was their ninth crossing on her; really, they loved her better, every time. The lounge was the cosiest place on board. Perhaps Miss — thanks, Warburton? — played bridge. The General did love his game of an evening. And then, just as the good lady was mentally casting about for a potential fourth, the black-bordered relict at Aileen's other hand had leaped into the talk with his trivial question.

Facing him long enough to give back her answer, Aileen was sufficiently generous to admit that his face atoned in part for his sable haberdashery. He looked as if he knew things, looked as if his grandsires' portraits were done in oils, not in shiny-paper silhouettes. His nose was beaklike, and his dark eyes were haughty; but his smile had intervals of being boyish. With the deliberate swiftness which characterized most of her mental processes and physical gestures, Aileen made detailed enumeration of his features. Then, as her glance went back again to her opposite neighbour, it rested for an instant upon Clode. By reason of her change of table, he now sat facing her and only a table or two away. Beside the vividness of the man next to her, Clode, despite the premature whitening of his hair, looked chiefly tea-coloured, and only the deep-set eyes and the shutting of the lips redeemed him from hopeless mediocrity.

Nevertheless, as she met his cool and steady gaze, the gaze that one bestows on any actor who has chanced to catch one's interest, Aileen felt her colour come. The look was too impersonal to be impertinent, too full of idle curiosity to be antagonistic. And yet, Aileen was antagonized. Her colour deepened. Then, without hesitation, obedient to the woman in her, she turned back to the black-edged relict by her side, and flung herself into eager conversation.

As a matter of course, they played bridge in the lounge, that night, Aileen at first with the General as her partner. Later, in the second rubber, the cards paired her off with Stanway. And it was in the middle of the second rubber that Clode, after an innumerable succession of cigarettes consumed on deck, came straying into the lounge in search of novels. Aileen's back was towards the book-cases. Over the top of his catalogue, Clode studied her, noted the firm, true line where neck melted into shoulder, noted the well-set ear beneath its shadowing mass of hair; noted, above all, the subtle distinction she made between her treatment of the white-haired General and the stricken Stanway, with both of whom she appeared to be upon surprisingly good terms. Indeed, the General was in a fury of senile gallantry which seemed to disturb his wife not one whit; while, as for Stanway, he was having all he could do to keep a firm hold upon the edges of his melancholy.

Clode closed the catalogue with a snap.

"I'll take that one, that red one in the middle," he said shortly, and his fingers shut upon a re-

cent detective story of the most uncompromising type.

Aileen's back was towards him; but Stanway, owner of the dummy hand, was watching. The book had been bought too lately to have received as yet the uniform binding of the ship's library. Reader of Maeterlinck that he was, Stanway saw the flashy covers, read the title. His eyes went from the book to Clode's face and back again; then he wiped the smile off his own face with ostentatious care, and shrugged his shoulders slightly, as who should say,—

"Oh, yes; a ship like this is bound to carry all sorts."

And Clode, who too knew Maeterlinck and, when he could get nothing better, also read him, interpreted the smile correctly. As result of his interpretation, he flung himself down, detective story and all, in a deep chair at the General's elbow, and began to read with an absorption in his narrative which bordered on the violent.

A stir around him, though, allowed his dignity to yield to curiosity, and he looked up. Out at the head of the main staircase, the orchestra had struck the first chords of *God Save the King*. Aileen was already on her feet, conspicuous alike for her yellow hair and for her clinging white crepe gown, and one by one the other occupants of the room followed her example, some as a matter of course, some with the remonstrant countenance assumed by an American before a hallowed custom of another country. Clode scrambled to his feet a bit too hurriedly for perfect grace; the years since he had been in like

circumstances had caused him to forget the first clause of the British ritual. Once on his feet, though, he stiffened sharply and came to erect and forcible attention. Stanway, just lounging negligently out of his chair, was bantering the girl before him. The last words of her defence came clearly to Clode's ears, —

"Besides all that," she said rather haughtily, or so it seemed to Clode; "our present hosts are Englishmen. We owe them something on that score."

The last note ended, she turned as if to go away. Then apparently she changed her mind, dropped back again into her chair, and smiled straight into the eyes of her feminine companion.

"I do want to thank you for my nice evening, and," her glance included the grey-headed General; "and for your taking me under your protection so soon. I've never crossed alone before; and —" this time, her glance, as if unconsciously, turned upon Clode, who was watching her from above the lurid cover of his book; "I am afraid it is n't going to be quite as simple a matter as I thought it would be."

The older woman smiled in perfect comprehension. Then she laid on Aileen's hand her own plump white one, where a single huge emerald guarded the thin old wedding ring.

"Don't worry about that, my dear," she said comfortably. "The General and I are delighted to have you with us, whenever you feel lonely. Tomorrow morning, we'll have a grand gossip, and no doubt we shall find that we have dozens of friends in common. Anyway," and again she smiled directly

into Aileen's troubled face; "as far as that goes, I fancy we neither one of us need much guaranteeing."

Clode, listening, watching, agreed with her. Nevertheless, he liked the little burst of self-confession that came tumbling out of Aileen's lips which, for the first time in his short knowledge of her, had lost their upward curve of satisfied and self-contained assurance.

"I am so glad. I wish you would. You see, my mother is n't well, this year; and my sisters decided they would go to Maine. I had no idea of crossing, till three days ago; but I have a young niece over there, who has been begging me to join her; and, in the same mail with her last letter, there was an invitation to visit an old friend in Salisbury, so I yielded to temptation."

"But you are not sorry, I hope, Miss Warburton?"

This last came from Stanway. Clode, still listening, felt a sudden longing to pitch the man overboard. His black studs, it seemed to Clode, rendered his accent a social impossibility. Then Clode chuckled. Aileen's answering accent assured him that she needed no intervention on her behalf. Her dignity was perfect.

"I most certainly am, Mr. Stanway. I have crossed so often with my own people that I had come to think of the voyage as a bit of home life in a portable environment. I am discovering that one small mother in the offing changes one's entire horizon. There are some things we never think about, until we lose them."

In her haste to make clear her present wish for proper matronage, she failed to take into account the possible effect of her phrase on Stanway's susceptibilities. His long, deep sigh recalled her to her mannerly memory of his livery of woe.

"That is so pitifully true, Miss Warburton," he murmured, without lifting his sombre gaze from the scarlet cards on the table before him. "It is the one lesson I am steadying myself to learn."

From under her thick yellow lashes, Aileen cast upon him a comically scared glance of contrition. She felt like a child so engrossed in mourning for her broken doll that she failed to realize that she was treading on the wounded paw of a faithful collie. To be sure, the collie probably would have snapped at her, not whimpered impotently. But, meanwhile, she was not just sure what apology she ought to make; therefore she fell back upon the wholly obvious, and fled.

"I am so sorry," she said, and then she rose. "Thank you all for my happy evening."

Swiftly the sorrowing one regained his interest in the present.

"Must you go? Surely we can have just one more rubber?"

She looked a trifle dazed at his rapid and absolute recovery of mood. As yet, no serious grief had come into her life; but she possessed her own theories of permanence, as a more or less essential element of mourning.

"Poor Marie was up at all hours, this morning; I must let her go to bed. Good-night." And, with a smile which carefully effaced itself, as it met the

outer edges of her own small group, she turned away and left them.

Room Sixty-seven on the *Beatic* was not unduly capacious; but Marie was a veteran traveller and somewhat of a genius withal. Judicious bribery had done the rest, and Aileen went down to find her quarters as orderly and well-nigh as dainty as was her room at home. Two windows, one looking towards the bow, and a portable reading lamp beside one's bed: these small details atone for much, and frilly bags and dangling pockets achieved the rest.

Aileen's long yellow hair brushed and braided, Aileen's long, slim person wrapped in a dressing gown, and Marie sent away to her own room and berth, the cabin took on a quiet comfort that its owner deemed exceedingly restful, after the whirr of getting off, the strain of downing the self-consciousness that inevitably had arisen, once she had found herself alone among so many strangers. It was too early to sleep, for hours and hours. Aileen chose out a novel from the pile beside her, turned on the light, and flung herself down on her bed, to read and rest till sleep should come within wooing distance. But, although sleep was as remote as ever, at the end of the first half-hour she dropped her book, switched off the nearest light, and, with her hands clasped above her head, lay staring at the opposite wall and listening to the silky swish of the summer sea, as the ship cut her way forward under the August stars.

It was a good ship, and a comfortable, she told herself. Indeed, it must be, to have attracted so many men from other lines. As yet, the officers had made scanty impression on her. She doubted their

doing so, even in the end of things; after innumerable crossings, brass buttons lose a little of their glamour. But, among the underlings, the people who, as Aileen well knew, most truly would minister to her actual comfort, she had found familiar faces upon every hand. The blond little deck steward with the sturdy shoulders and the steady eyes, eyes such as one gets with years of looking out across the sea: this would be the fifth week she had experienced of his skilful tucks and pattings. Clode's table steward, a tall, thin Briton with a fierce waxed moustache, hair the colour of her own, and not an aitch to his name, had sent her a joyous smile of welcome from above Clode's shoulder, and, later, had whispered in her ear his intention of getting himself transferred into her service. And as for Tommy Owens, quarter master and general factotum, Tommy had flung discipline and etiquette to the four winds of the North River, when he had seen her come on board.

Aileen smiled softly to herself, as she lay there at her ease, calling over to herself the roll of these faithful, nameless, loyal friends. Among them all, secure in all her past traditions, really she needed no other protector. And that silky swish of peacefully moving waters! How good it was to find herself afloat again! She settled back more comfortably against the pillows. Already the *Beatic* was throwing her spell upon her, that personal, almost animate spell exerted only by a well-loved, well-tried ship, and only upon the few who comprehend the wordless, loving language of the sea.

And the ship was so luxuriously empty! All those

great stretches of the boat deck for those few people! All the quiet nooks and angles where, with only Marie in attendance, she could hide herself and read, or dream away the hours, her wide-eyed gaze upon the summer sea! It had been a dazzling blue sea, to-day. Later, Aileen hoped, it would turn to murky grey, then trim itself with lacy frills and circling eddies of greenish white. And that would, as she knew from past experience, deplete the crowd on deck so much the more.

It was not so great a crowd, after all, ninety or so, in spaces planned for hundreds. Aileen gave a little sigh of sheer content. The voyage promised to be a new experience for her in other ways than in her lack of chaperonage. Always, up to now, she had crossed in the high tide of the annual migration, had found her life on ship in all respects as elaborately organized as in the very apex of the height of the season at home. This would be different, quieter, infinitely more human.

Quantity apart, though, the more she thought about it, the quality of the people did not interest her. There were the half-dozen or more Sedalians who, mercifully, had chairs upon the starboard deck; there were two or three prosaic family parties, and seven or eight spinsters, unattached save to each other and to their Baedekers, who had spent the afternoon amicably exchanging details of their proposed itineraries: none of these were especially interesting, not nearly so interesting as Tommy Owens of the red head and facile tongue. But, on the other hand, the old General and his wife were manifestly choice spirits. And there was Stanway, hawk-nosed

and impressive in his sable plumage. Aileen's eyes danced at the memory of the all-pervading melancholy of his belongings from his rugs to his shiny gloves; danced at the memory of the way his melancholy yielded to the charms of bridge and of a pretty woman. For Aileen Warburton possessed no modest hallucinations as concerned her own appearance. She had two eyes and an undue supply of mirrors.

And then, besides, there was the little, short man with the ash-grey hair and the cast-iron jaw, the man who had scowled at her with such manifest disapproval that she had been guilty of the weakness of putting up her hand to assure herself that her hat was straight. He did not look especially companionable — and her eyes danced again, as she chose her mental phrases with due care — but he did look interesting.

Smiling, she rose and turned off the rest of the lights. Sleep would never come in wooing distance, with two bulbs blazing overhead. Besides, the glare was curiously out of harmony with the swishing of the sea. Much better to lie there in the salty darkness, and listen to the sea, and to the voices of the sailors, far forward in the bow. Seven bells! She counted slowly. Time she was asleep. Save for the sailors, every one was still. And then she caught her breath, and listened more intently.

Coming slowly up the deck outside her window was an even tread, a slow tread, too even and too slow, too quiet in its steady self-control to be the step of any sailor, too quiet and too steady to drive away the sleep she meant now to woo in good earnest. Rather, it lent itself completely to the swishing

cadence of the sea, to the rhythmic rocking of her narrow bed.

Up and down it went, and up and down again, just underneath her windows; and then, above the accompanying beat of footsteps, there came a slim thread of melody, whistled softly at first, then hummed just as softly, then, as if yielding to the spell of night and sea, softly and softly breaking into words. The voice, lowered to the merest whisper, was a mellow baritone, well-trained and sweet. It was the words, though, which caused Aileen to catch her breath, the while she listened.

“If through unruffled seas,
Towards heaven we calmly sail —”

And again, —

“Blest be the sorrow, kind the storm,
That drives us nearer home.”

The accent was too good to come from one of the sailors. Aileen Warburton fell asleep, wondering which of her fellow-passengers would be on deck at midnight, singing hymns, and not a serenade.

CHAPTER THREE

NEXT morning, she was destined to find out.

Breakfast over, she returned to her cabin in search of Marie. As she went down the passage, she was met by a thin little lilt of song, Schubert, this time, and hence, orthodox. At the door of her room, the end one of the passage and just underneath the bridge, she found Haydock, her steward. Haydock was short and blowsy, owner of a cast in his eye, a dubious knee joint, and a heart of purest gold, a heart which he had laid at Aileen's feet, the noon before. Likewise, he possessed a stentorian voice and absolutely no respect of persons.

"Gentleman next door has got a nice voice, Miss Warburton; has n't he?" he demanded cheerily.

Schubert faltered, lost a note, then went on, with what manifestly was a sturdy determination to ignore the gallery.

"Very," Miss Warburton answered softly.

"And it does me good to hear them sing," Haydock continued, still in his own mood of lusty cheer. "It makes the time pass nicely for all around, and a man that sings is never half so likely to be sea-sick; he keeps his pores open, as it were. A dozen doses of Mother Sill are n't half so useful as a good bit out of the music halls, like that he's singing."

This time, when Schubert faltered, he flickered and went out completely. Aileen, as she shut the door

behind Haydock's retreating back, could not find it in her heart of hearts to wonder.

Marie was invisible, doubtless busy with the trunks in her own cabin; so, after an interval, Aileen gave up waiting for her, and, novel in one hand and a vast silvery veil trailing across the other arm, she opened the door and started to step out into the passage. Unhappily, the passage was a narrow one, and some one else had stepped out into it ahead of her, the unseen singer opposite, Clode. Moreover, Clode was too absorbed in the intricacies of setting his door upon the hook to heed the opening door behind him. For three minutes and for four, he struggled valiantly, but vainly. Then, with a snap, the hook went home, and with it went a little wedge of finger.

"Damn!" Clode said, as distinctly as he could, around the injured, gory member.

Then he took his finger out of his mouth and held it up for his own inspection, backing off, the while, as if to get a better view of the ruin that he had created. Next minute, he realized his mistake. Not only had his finger followed him at quite an unvarying distance; but, in his extreme interest in it, he had failed to note that he was backing directly on Miss Warburton. Only when his boot heels landed upon her toes did he become aware of her existence. Then he turned on her a countenance where extreme self-abasement had not as yet had time wholly to conquer the injured rage with which he had been glowering at his riven finger.

"I beg your pardon," he said gruffly. "I fear I'm very awkward."

Penitence was wholly lacking from his tone. Aileen forgot her manners and her years, in testy resentment at the lack. She had been used to other treatment than that of having a strange man step on her, and then show temper at her being in his way.

"I am afraid you are," she said, and the angle of her chin went upward by a good fifteen degrees.

It was years and decades since anybody had ventured to rebuke Carl Clode in this high and mighty fashion. The girl's accent recalled certain bad hours of his vanished youth, and some subtle association of ideas caused him once more to clap his injured finger into his mouth, as he stood there facing her.

"I'm sure I'm very sorry," he said curtly from around the finger.

The angle of her chin went higher.

"I beg you won't think of it again," she answered crushingly. Then, as he took his finger out of his mouth, her hauteur crumbled swiftly. "Oh, what a nasty cut! Let me give you some peroxide!"

But now it was Clode's turn to show himself aggrieved. All of a sudden, he had recollected that he was no awkward urchin, ripe for scoldings, but a full-grown man, and one accustomed to deliver lectures, not receive them. His eyes met Aileen's eyes upon a level. Nevertheless, he bestowed on her a look that made her feel a pigmy.

"Thank you," he said. "For such a scratch, it's hardly necessary." Then he jerked off his cap and stood aside, in evident expectation and still more evident hope that she would go away and leave him

to take care of his own finger, without any help from her.

Quite naturally, Aileen Warburton went. As she went, she reflected upon the uncomfortable chance which had given for her opposite neighbour the one person on board who had antagonized her. Not that neighbourhood counts on shipboard, save in so far as the narrowness of the roadways and their occasional unsteadiness make it a trifle difficult to pass your neighbour by upon the other side. And there were alleviating circumstances, too. Whatever his other faults, Clode was not likely to stand about and talk and generally to render himself a bore. The fun flashed up again into her eyes, as she recalled her poor peroxide. The fun was still in her eyes, as Clode came striding past her, in search of the deck steward; it caused her to acknowledge his curt nod with a suave and sweeping bow.

Clode hunted vainly down the deck; then he turned and came up again, just as the steward stepped out of the doorway. They met, six feet from Miss Warburton's chair.

"You reserved a chair for me, Steward?" Clode asked, and his voice, freed from either temper or resentment, won the girl's frank liking.

"What name, sir?" the steward asked, and Aileen pricked up her ears.

"Clode. In Sixty-five."

"Clode. Cl—" The deck steward fluttered the leaves of his note-book, from which, to all seeming, he was never severed. "Yes. Mr. Carl Clode? Yes. Here it is, sir, just here." And he pointed to the chair next but one to the spot where Aileen was

struggling with her rug. "Shall I tuck you, Miss Warburton? Best let me; it's a little breezy, this morning. You'll like a rug, too, Mr. Clode?" he added, over his shoulder.

There was an instant's silence while the deck steward in his turn struggled with the rug, and Clode, as was evident to Aileen, malignly watching, struggled with his feelings. Then, as one who snaps his fingers in the face of Fate, Clode yielded to the note-book and to the inevitable.

"Best bring one out here, Steward," he said calmly. "It may be useful, though, as a rule, I rarely use a deck chair very much."

Which was literally true. It was precisely fifteen years since he had been in a deck chair till the day before.

"Thank you, Steward," Aileen said graciously. "That is delightful. I remember your old trick of packing me into my rug." And then, with some haste, she opened her novel and buried herself behind its pages.

Stanway, looking more than ever black-bordered in the yellow morning sunshine, was coming down the deck and, for the present, Miss Aileen Warburton had no especial desire for his society. Instinct and experience both assured her that Stanway, despite his beak-like nose and flashing eyes, might have certain attributes of the domestic cat. However, he was not devoid of interest, lacking better. It was only that, for the hour, the better was at hand. For Aileen Warburton preferred the newcomer, the unclassified, to the well-known and the expected. Perhaps this may have come out of the uniformity of

attitude towards her, once they came within classifying distance.

For the present, then, the better was at hand. Clode, his scarlet-bound detective story under his arm, was trying to adjust his knees and elbows to the unfamiliar angles of the chair; and Aileen, blind to the approach of Stanway, but alert to watch Clode's every motion, settled herself to discover what would happen next. Stanway, his black gloves clasped behind him, his head bent forward as in melancholy musing, went past her down the deck, striding through the games of shuffleboard as if they and their Sedalians were merest figments of a disordered brain, rounded the angle at the stern and, after due interval, reappeared again, rounding the angle at the bow. Clode, at her elbow, twisted his legs into unseemly knots, the while he read his novel. Aileen, her face hidden from his eyes by her silvery muffling veil, studied his boots intently and decided that she liked them, studied the feet and gave to them, too, her full approval. Then her eyes went upward to the hand that held the book, a slim hand and muscular and not too long, a hand to grasp things, not to touch them lightly. On one finger was a signet cut in jade, the symbolism of the stone and its arresting colour offering curious contrast to the apparent character of the man who wore it.

And then, for a longish interval, nothing happened except the sunshine and the sliding sea, and the regular sequence of the appearances and vanishings of the lugubrious Stanway. The General and his wife had been invisible since breakfast; Aileen's novel was proving itself a bore; Clode, as a subject for in-

vestigation, lacked variety. Aileen resolved, if nothing happened in the meantime, that she would smile at Stanway on his next round but two. That offered still a little chance for Fate to intervene for her amusement, since, despite his stride, Stanway was deliberate. Smiled at, he must of necessity either sit down beside her for a gossip, or else pluck her out of her swaddling rugs and take her to walk with him. Aileen Warburton was not, as a rule, allowed to come upon her own resources for her entertainment. She had plenty of grey matter of her own; the convolutions of her brain were intricate enough to satisfy the most critical of judges; yet, for her amusement, she preferred to count upon the brains of other people. On his next round but two, then, she would smile at Stanway, and wait to see what he would do about it.

To be sure, it would have been nicer, if Mrs. General had been settled in the chair beside her, to mount guard over her manners and her novel. Still, the acquaintance had received the sanction of Mrs. General, the night before and again at breakfast; and even at thirty-two, Miss Aileen Warburton could imagine nothing essentially skittish inherent in so recent a relict as was Stanway. He was unguaranteed, of course; but he looked very safe and sorrowing. Besides, chaperon or no chaperon, one could not sit still in a deck chair, to the utter atrophy of all one's joints. Here he was again. Well, the next time but one.

A shadow fell across her open book, and Miss Warburton swiftly reconsidered. After all, it would not be quite nice to be walking the deck with a total

stranger, just the first day out, especially since Marie had not been in evidence, all morning.

The owner of the shadow had paused, not in front of Aileen's deck chair, but in front of the one inhabited by Clode. Taken as substance, he was more than likable. His gold braid and buttons showed his rank no whit more clearly than did his erect bearing, his well-set head. He was small; but in some Englishmen race and breeding give a sense of latent power that vastly transcends mere bulk in pounds and inches. This man was born to rule; his shoulders showed it, and his eyes, dark eyes and keen. Above them, the dark brows almost met; there was barely room between them for the little vertical lines which were born, not out of temper, but from hard, tense thought and care. The hair was dark, too, dark the little waxed moustache that shaded the firm, thin lips. Altogether a man, Aileen decided instantly, and one whom, like so many of her woman chums at home, it would be really nice to know.

Best of all, his voice was quite in harmony with all the rest of his make-up, as he said interrogatively, —

“Mr. Carl Clode?”

The detective story went tumbling to the floor, as Clode sat up in answer to the question. As he sat up, his eyes took understanding note of the questioner's insignia of rank; Clode swiftly wondered what was the cause of this official visitation, which might mean anything at all.

“You know Bernie Lennox, I think? Yes?” The speaker paused, to cast a querying glance at Aileen, who had looked up sharply, at the name, then low-

ered her eyes again, as ashamed of her involuntary betrayal of interest. "I've just had a wireless from him, by way of 'Sconset, asking me to look you up. I'm Grieg, chief steward, and Bernie is my second cousin."

"Really? That's good to hear," Clode said, with ready friendliness, as he slid out of his chair and shook himself, much as a waking Newfoundland puppy might have done.

Grieg answered the first word only.

"Yes, for all he is American and I English, Bernie's mother and mine were first cousins. His grandfather migrated early. Mine took his restlessness out on shipboard. But, after all, I invariably remind Bernie that he is English at the core, in spite of his New York boots and accent."

Clode laughed.

"He manages to conceal the fact rather well. I supposed he was ineradicably American. We were chums in my junior year in college. He did n't stay out the course, you know."

"So I heard; but I never knew the reason. Bernie never welcomed inquiries on the subject. It did n't seem quite like him, though, to drop a thing, once he had undertaken it, and nobody who knew Bernie Lennox would have said there could ever be any question of his brains."

"Brains! Bernie!" Clode's fists went into his pockets with a bang that threatened to wrench the cloth apart. "Good Lord, no! Bernie was the wonder of his class."

"What was it, then?"

"The old story. A confounded girl. Oh, for

that matter, she was all right enough, only she had n't any conscience. She got herself engaged to Bernie, the vacation before our junior year. That Christmas holidays, she went to Washington, found a man there she liked better, chucked Bernie, then chucked the other man and took Bernie on again, then chucked them both. It knocked out Bernie utterly. By May, he was a wreck. He finished out his year, and then went off to Germany and Paris. I can't say I blame him. A girl like that ought to go muzzled. Where is Bernie now?"

"Consular service. Florence, I think. Just now, though, he is in New York."

"Really! I have n't heard of him for years. I began to think he had forgotten me."

"No. Evidently not. The wireless shows that."

"Evidently not," Clode echoed. "Poor old Bernie! Consular service; in other words, a governmental loafer! And Bernie Lennox had the best head for mathematics in my time. If he'd held on, he'd have made a record. Confound that girl, anyhow! I wish I had her here."

Miss Aileen Warburton rose and discreetly walked away out of earshot, her cheeks unduly pink. It is not altogether agreeable to sit by and listen while two men combine to abuse another woman, especially when —

"Now, Mr. Clode," Grieg was saying, in his pleasant English voice; "what am I going to do to make you have a comfortable voyage?"

Clode answered with the requisite platitude. Then, that formality over and dismissed into the past, the two men walked away together down the deck, talk-

ing diligently, and no less diligently laying the foundations of a friendship which was bound to become lasting.

And meanwhile, in her cabin, Aileen Warburton threw aside her muffing veil, and laid her hands, palms outward, against her burning cheeks. The glare on the water had been strong, and the veil was warm. However, in her heart, she told herself that neither excuse held good. Her cheeks were burning at the tone of condemnation in which both Clode and the ship's officer had spoken of a woman whom neither of them had seen. Was it quite fair of them, quite manly, to take her blameworthiness on trust? She might have something to say in her own defence. The laws of chivalry, yes, and of common mercy forbade the pronouncing judgment on a girl until she had had chance to plead her cause. Besides — and underneath her blush of anger, Aileen's face broke into a smile — besides, there were some women who really could n't help it. With all sorts of nice men standing about and waiting for a share in her attention, how could any woman have time to make judicial choice? Besides, no girl in the later 'teens, as this girl must have been, has ever seen even a largish share of the human race. How then, in any given case, can she be sure that the man she chooses is the best man she is bound to meet? And, if she meets another, better one, what then? Is she to cling like a barnacle to her earlier mistake? To all appearing, yes; or else be bracketed with expungeable adjectives upon the tongues of nice men, later on.

It was in a mood of acute depression that Aileen Warburton sat on the edge of her bed, her chin in

her fists and her boot heels firmly planted on the red-brown carpet. For the present, her decorous longings for a chaperon had merged themselves into a furious hatred of mankind as exemplified in the officer and Clode, into a no less furious wish for feminine companionship of almost any sort.

CHAPTER FOUR

"AND yet, after all," Miss Aileen Warburton remarked at her pile of hairpins when, Marie gone, she was alone in her cabin, that night; "he is n't quite the cub he seems."

All things considered, the verdict was a generous one, although *cub*, as applied to Clode, seemed a bit too juvenile a word to be quite accurate. The facts of the case, though, appeared to justify its choice. At her first glance, Aileen had judged Clode to be a veritable child in the laws of social usage. Now, all in all, she doubted her original decision, and her doubts appeared to her to hold within them germs of good times to come. And Stanway already had had one period of being very cloying.

From chicken broth to luncheon time, Clode had been invisible, invisible after luncheon until almost time for tea. Then Aileen, walking the deck with Mrs. General, had come upon him playing bull with two impenetrable Englishmen and one of the snub-nosed Sedalians, had exchanged bows and the edges of a smile which assured each of them that the other was beginning to see faint glimmerings of fun in their morning meeting. At their second round of the deck, Clode smiled at them quite frankly; at the third one, he ventured a comment on the smoothness of the sea. Fifteen minutes later, the first clinking

of cups brought him tramping up the boat deck towards his chair.

Mrs. General was temporarily occupying the one next to it, and Clode lowered himself beside her without the slightest pretext of ignoring the presence of herself and Aileen. Instead, he beamed upon them affably, tucked in their rugs, and steadied their cups of tea while they made deliberate choice among the fragments of bread-and-butter and pound cake outspread for their approval. The fact of the matter was that, since he had come on board, the day before, Clode had had the impression of having been in solitary confinement, an impression in no way lessened by the presence of the brace of Britons and the Sedalian. Mere human flesh and blood is not, of necessity, companionable. Wherefore Clode's eyes brightened, as they rested on the motherly face of Mrs. General.

The talk, naturally, was futile. It concerned the temperature, and Clode's preference for lemon in his tea, and the probability of a quiet crossing. It touched upon the labour troubles that were shattering the peace of England just then, and it glanced sharply away again, as if frightened at the tightening of Clode's expressive lips. It dallied with the causes of the long interval since Clode's last crossing, with Aileen's reasons for crossing by herself, with Mrs. General's summer plans which were comfortably vague, even in their main outlines, with the mental eccentricities of the buxom Marie, and with Clode's own doubts as concerned his seamanship.

And then, her cup emptied, Mrs. General rose.

"All this is very nice. I'd love to stay here in-

definitely; but I have a husband on board. It is my duty to see what he is doing."

As a matter of course, her rising brought Clode to his feet. He hesitated a little uncertainly. Then, as he saw Stanway looming in the distance, he settled himself deliberately on top of the rugs abandoned by Mrs. General.

"If I may?" he said tentatively, once he had slid himself back into position. Then, taking Aileen's reply for granted, he moved his cap from his head to the angle of his knee, clasped his strong, brown hands behind his head, and faced the woman beside him.

"You were saying?" he remarked.

"I was n't," she corrected him, with a smile. "I was merely looking on, and thinking things."

"For instance?"

His glance met hers, expressive, whimsical. Then she took warning by something behind the fun in his eyes. Total stranger as he had been, an hour before, she was conscious of a certain sway his mind seemed to be exerting on her own. Not that she believed him to be conscious of it. Nevertheless, her woman's nature recoiled sharply from the fact itself. For just one instant, their two individualities had met, and clashed; the first of many times to come. Neither one of them quite knew what was the cause of the sudden discomfort that had fallen on them both; they realized it acutely, though. There came an instant's pause, before Aileen answered.

"I was a whole deck length away from here," she said, with a falsehood whose obviousness quite wiped out its crime; "wishing I were of the age and point

of view where I could enjoy that." And she pointed down their own deck and across to the top deck of the second class where a score of youths and maidens were marching in hilarious procession to the music of their dinner gong that dangled from the hand of their jocund leader.

Clode turned his head to gaze at them thoughtfully. Then he turned back again. The excuse, hastily evolved by his companion, fitted his own mood too well to be neglected.

"Yes. It is hideously hot in that sunshine, and they are making a fearful row. And yet, I rather envy them their ability to enjoy it. The age that sits in a deck chair and looks on, the civilization that causes us to demand a bugle instead of a gong: these make us lose any amount of pleasure."

"But you would n't cross second, for all that?" she said, with some hostility. It seemed to her that his accent laid undue emphasis upon the gulf marked by the fifteen feet of space that parted the deck where they were sitting from the one where the mirthful procession marched and countermarched in the hot sun of the late August afternoon.

But he answered her quite frankly.

"No; it would spoil my disposition to have the first-class people looking at me. I never yet have seen a fence of any height, without an overwhelming desire to take it. Those people are comfortable enough for all practical purposes. The only trouble is, they are 'those people.' Our using the phrase tells the whole story."

Miss Warburton smiled thoughtfully.

"That, yes. It all goes with the gong, though,

and with their sense of humour. That is what I say. We lose a good deal by our relative civilization."

Clode rose to his feet, swinging his cap into position. Then, turning slightly, he smiled down at his companion.

"Then dismiss a little of yours, and come for a walk," he bade her. "It is growing a bit cooler. Will you come?"

Her blond head was on a level with his ashy-grey one, as they went down the deck; her step was well-nigh as firm as was his own. She wore a dull-blue gown, that afternoon, touched on the collar with a bit of gold; and her small hat was almost military in its smart severity. Beside her, even the women on her own deck looked slouchy, and the fouldarded Sedalians became as amorphous as a row of bolsters. Marie had been wise and prudent. She had turned out her mistress looking what, for the time, she was: an adjunct of the ship. It was not Marie's fault, nor was it precisely the fault of Marie's mistress that she should set the standard once for all, a standard by which the other women, weighed, were found for the most part pathetically wanting.

Beside her, though, Clode held his own, less by reason of his tailor than inherently. Before they had gone halfway round the deck, Aileen was perfectly aware that her companion was taking her as an incident, was giving her only a moiety of his attention; that she interested him acutely, without absorbing him in the very least. And Aileen Warburton was accustomed to absorb. Therefore, she determined to give her companion a small shock; if need be, the first of many.

A shock, however, to be quite effective, needs to be dealt with care. Therefore, —

“Let’s stop and watch them, for a minute,” she said, as they threaded their way among the players of bull.

“You like the game?” he asked her quickly, for he was among the men who find their rest in physical exercise of almost any sort.

She shook her head.

“Horrible! No. I could n’t hit it, if I tried, and never have felt the slightest desire to try. It looks too futile even to be classed as a full-fledged bore.” Then, that danger ward off, she returned to her first position. “I mean, let’s stop and watch the people on the other deck. They rather fascinate me, do you know.” Her elbows on the rail, she spoke slowly, meditatively, while her grey eyes rested on the jovial youngsters, fifteen feet and a half a world away, now dancing a travesty of the Virginia reel to the discordant clashing of the maltreated gong. “What especially charms me about them is the way they drift into the extreme of friendship with each other. I suppose most of them never saw each other until noon, yesterday; and now, behold!”

She had read her companion shrewdly enough to predict the general theme of his reply, but not its directness. She winced a little, as he said, —

“But you and I did n’t see each other till then, either.”

Her colour came. Her unchaperoned position was still a source of acute self-consciousness.

“No. But we don’t do that,” she said defensively,

and her stress upon the final word took the place of volumes of explanation.

Again she was destined to flush at the directness of his reply, for, —

“No. Therein lies the difference summed up in exchanging the gong for the bugle and its mess call. Besides,” and now his eyes were merry; “it is some little time since I was twenty-one.”

He had not meant the words as a challenge; nevertheless, he liked the gallant way she answered to it.

“Alas, I’ve ceased to count my own vanished years. When I was twenty-five, I made up my mind I’d stop having birthdays; and it is so long since then that I have about lost count, myself. However, age is a question of one’s sense of humour, and that depends on alkaloids and ancestors. I doubt if, at seven, I’d have frisked like that maid in green.”

“You’d have danced minuets, at that age?” Clode queried, with palpable curiosity, for he had never owned a sister, and he had been sent away to school before he had left off patent-leather belts and ties that hung down outside his little blouses.

“Never!” she told him, with some energy.

“What then?”

For a full minute, her grey eyes met his demurely. Then, —

“Prisoner’s base,” she told him.

And then she brought herself up short, with a belated realization that all her careful opening had left her nowhere in particular. In the simplest, most casual way imaginable, Clode had totally diverted the talk from the line which she had chosen for it,

had left her, to all intents and purposes, farther from her point than she had been when she had begun. However, a second devious opening would be quite as futile, she told herself, besides the loss of dignity that would come by laying stress upon her indirectness. And yet, it did not suit her to give in supinely and allow her conversational manoeuvres to be outflanked in this fashion. Accordingly, Clode, had he known her longer, would have read more than a hint of petulance in her abrupt turning from the rail.

"They're better worth watching from afar, I fancy," he said, as he fell into step beside her.

Then he eyed her narrowly, astonished at the flash which followed. Manlike, he had been unaware of the broken contact of her well-bred egotism that had given it birth.

"Are n't we all of us?" she was saying a little tartly. "That's not a matter to be parcelled off by class distinctions." Then swiftly she caught at the opening he had made, dismissing her tartness in favour of the point that must be driven home. "Apropos," she said slowly, and then she stopped and apparently became absorbed in the fastenings of her coat.

Clode eyed her furtively and with no small amusement. It seemed to him that a single-breasted coat buttoning straight down the middle of the front could not offer much opportunity for confusion. He wondered what she was getting at, anyway. All in all, she interested him, did this woman with the tread of a frank boy and the wayward mind of a spoiled débutante, half through her initial season.

"Apropos?" he reminded her, after an interval.

Deliberately she finished buttoning her coat, deliberately she passed her adjusting hands down the length of the collar. Then she looked up, smiled, and said briskly, —

"Apropos? Oh, yes. I was forgetting. I ought n't to, either, for I've a confession on my mind. I eavesdropped, when you were talking to your officer."

Clode's lips curved into an irrepressible smile.

"So I noticed," he said calmly. "What of it?"

She caught her breath sharply, and only her longish training in the ways of decorum kept her from casting it out again with explosive rage. What business had this man, this total stranger, to treat her as if she were a child? The courteous unconcern of his whole manner increased his crime ten-fold. She longed to smite him heavily, in phrase, if not in fact. And yet, one, as a rule, did not discipline a stranger for crimes of sheer omission. Therefore, as long as it was impossible to fight, she chose the alternative course, and fled.

"Here comes Mr. Stanway," she said, with outward assurance, but with an inward prayer that Stanway would play up bravely to her game. "I think he is looking for me. You will excuse me, Mr. Clode?"

And Stanway, by one of those rare mercies that now and then come to protect the evil-doer in his ways, did play up, and grandly.

"Miss Warburton, the General and his wife have sent me to look you up. They want to know if we can count on you for bridge, to-night." Then,

as he walked away at Aileen's side, he added a touch upon his own account. "Who's the stiff-backed little chap, anyhow? He looks as if he'd made his money out of nails."

And Clode, who thought he knew a minor poet when he saw one, heard, and, hearing, raged. What was more, he went up to the top deck to do his raging. When his emotions, joined with his aching muscles, told him it was safe to slow down his pace a little, he became uncomfortably aware that, just beneath him, Aileen and Stanway were leaning on the rail and gazing at the sunset. It was with a sense of positive relief, five minutes later, that Clode also became aware that the bugler was flattening horribly, as he gave the mess call. It seemed to Clode a fitting emblem of his day.

To be sure, Clode was the only person on the ship to recognize the flattening. In Clode, Fate had spoiled a musician in rounding out the man. There had been a year or two, indeed, when the man had trembled in the balance. Then it had won out, and now all that was left of the musician was a passionate love of all that was best in the art, and a mediocre ability as pianist. It would have been mediocre, that is, had it not been for Clode's intelligence and character, his sturdy determination to ignore all but the highest and best.

Critic that he was, moreover, he had an instinctive antipathy to the praises bestowed upon his playing by women who, unable to discriminate between Mendelssohn and Brahms, were only conscious that it was Carl Clode who played. Neither did he accept with pleasure random suggestions that he and a

piano should combine themselves with buttery buns and tea. In other words, Clode had decided to keep his music to himself and to those of his masculine friends who really wished it.

Dinner over, that night, he lingered at the table until the rest of the passengers had left the room. He had no especial hankerings for the society of the Sedalians, nor of the brace of actresses who were conspiring to puncture the impenetrability of his British mates at bull. Neither did he care to sit by, and watch Miss Warburton play bridge. Already he had come to the decision that she was the only woman on the ship worth watching; but that did not of necessity imply that she was worth watching at all hours. Seen against the black-bordered background of a man like Stanway, she failed to interest Clode. Therefore he preferred to take his chance of finding Grieg and having man-talk for an hour.

Aileen Warburton was one of those rare women to whom bridge was recreation, not scientific exercise. Half its recreative power came from the presence of an onlooker, to add perspective to her own absorption in the game. To-night, their quartette had their end of the lounge completely to themselves. Aileen's mind, instead of concentrating itself in the restful silence, went wandering up and down the highways and byways of the ship. The General rubbed his nose exasperatedly when, for the second time, Aileen had prudently said "spades" from above a no-trump hand. At the end of the second rubber, he took off his glasses with a vicious twitch that threatened to wreck the gearing of the miniature windlass which kept them out of his way when not in use.

His voice, however, was quite suave, when he spoke.

"My dear Miss Warburton, you are tired, to-night," he said benignly.

In spite of herself, Aileen laughed.

"Because I play so badly?" she inquired, without a trace of bitterness. "No; it is just stupidity. I have no excuse at all; I do this sort of thing, every now and then. The wonder is that I have n't been trumping all your aces. I usually do it. To-morrow night, I shall play like a professional; that is, if you'll give me another chance. No, Mr. Stanway. Not any more rubbers. I am going to bed."

"But it is only half-past nine," Stanway told her, horrified.

"I can't help it, if it's only half-past seven. Once I am like this, it is the end. Good-night." And she went away in search of Marie.

It was long before she found her, though. Half-way down the passage to her room, she caught the sound of a piano, caught a phrase she knew and loved. Somebody somewhere was playing a Chopin nocturne with a sane, clear interpretation which brought out every drop of Slavic blood in the composer's make-up. And Aileen, loving Chopin, understanding him more than most, as a rule found herself revolted by the mawkish sentiment read into him by amateurs. Her step slowed, hesitated, stopped. She forgot Marie, forgot bridge, forgot her fellow-passengers and gave herself up to discovering whence the music came.

Not a steward was in sight to tell her. The sound, coming from a lower deck, was not easy to trace. Hurried investigation, though, assured her

that it came most clearly to the head of a short stairway leading from a cross passage down to nowhere in particular. Moreover, for the hour, that part of the ship was quite deserted. Accordingly, Miss Aileen Warburton, without an instant's hesitation, tucked up the skirt of her dinner gown and sat herself down on the top stair to listen.

And, meanwhile, Clode, down in the dining-room, played on. He had found Grieg, had also found a good piano; and Grieg had begged him to play, assuring him that nobody but an occasional stray steward could hear. A dozen words from Grieg had also assured Clode that the trim little English officer understood music and loved it for its own sake, not as an accompaniment to polite conversation. And so, without a hint of hesitation, Clode had settled himself at the piano, prepared, if the ship's law so allowed, to make a night of it. He looked serenity itself as he sat there, lithe, erect, his shapely ash-grey head thrown upward and his keen eyes veiled.

And then, of a sudden, his serenity was shattered. Swishing linings and voices and, worst of all, adjectives were heard approaching down the main stairway leading to the room.

"What a lovely touch! I do hope we can get him to play some of Nevin's little things," one voice bubbled up above the general chatter.

Clode's hands fell from the keys, and he sprang to his feet. Grieg, laughing silently, made swift and accurate interpretation of the glance which Clode was flinging up and down the room. He pointed to a door close by the piano.

"You'll find those stairs all right. Thanks. See

you in the morning." And as Clode's coat tails vanished through the doorway, Grieg turned to face the invading bevy of enthusiastic women.

But Clode, ungracious, ungrateful, and worst of all, ungraceful, went bolting up the unfamiliar stairs in a haste which sent him sprawling over the unsuspecting woman seated at the top. The light was behind her and full in his eyes; disgust and embarrassment still further blinded him, as he picked himself up from on top of her and, with a muttered word of apology, sped on his irate course, impenitent and unrecognizing. And, —

"Good Lord! Another woman!" Aileen heard him exploding to himself, as he rushed on.

Another moment, and his cabin door banged to, behind him.

Perhaps, then, it was no wonder that, Marie gone, Aileen Warburton apostrophized her hairpins, late that night.

CHAPTER FIVE

NEXT day, suppressing all allusion either to Chopin or to the nautical equivalent of back stairs, Aileen returned to the charge which Clode, unwittingly or not, so dexterously had warded off, the day before.

Meanwhile, though, she had accumulated the acquaintance of Grieg. A hint to the General had done the deed most easily. The General had crossed with Grieg a score of times, had hunted him up at home in England, and knew him for just what he was, a simple, gallant gentleman whom any woman, young or old, might count it privilege to know. And the General, despite his years and the parti-coloured stripe of ribbon on the breasts of certain of his coats, despite, too, his obvious admiration of his buxom wife: the General, despite all this, yet had his own notions of what went to make a pretty face. Moreover, he was more than a little fearful he had given tongue to his testiness of the night before.

Accordingly, long before chicken broth, next morning, he had appeared beside Aileen's chair with Grieg. Aileen had received Grieg with a graciousness which implied that, in her eyes, his buttons were a negligible quantity in comparison with his personal graces and his moral charms. Then, making out a glint of humour in the dark eyes of her new acquaintance, she deftly switched the talk around to Chopin and her adventure of the night before.

Clode started up the deck, just then. His watch had assured him that he had been amusing himself for a good two hours, and he felt he might, without loss of dignity, offer himself as candidate for amusing conversation in a deck chair. As he rounded the angle of the smoking-room, however, he saw Aileen sitting bolt upright in her chair, talking animatedly to a uniform before her. A second glance assured him that the uniform held Grieg, and that the General was standing by, with the self-importance of any tugboat, nautical or social. A third glance told him that both the men were going into fits of laughter. Clode felt distinctly peeved. He turned his back, rounded the stern again, came up the starboard side, where the Sedalians made vain efforts to attract his attention and, heedless of broth and Britons, went stamping down the stairs to his own cabin.

At luncheon, he looked chastened, but determined. Luncheon over, he followed Aileen up on deck and put himself into the chair beside her.

She met him with a careless cordiality which the blond deck steward, busy converting her into a Scotch-plaid chrysalis, deemed the most charming thing imaginable. It caused Clode's jaws, though, to shut together ominously.

"Where have you been, all morning?" she asked him.

If she intended him to take her interest in his doings as a mark of favour, she yet was slightly staggered by the directness of his answer.

"Hanging about in the offing, waiting for a chance to talk to you."

"I was here."

"So were too many other people," he told her grimly. "I hate a crowd, all chattering at once."

Only her eyes showed her annoyance at his self-assumed right to criticise the way she spent her time. Yet she resolved to defend herself.

"We were n't chattering. I met your friend, Mr. Grieg."

"So I saw."

His tone was curt. She looked up at him apprehensively.

"Where were you?"

"Down at the stern, among the bullboards."

Her face cleared, as her eyes passed his and measured the distance. Away down there, even her animated gestures could have conveyed to him no inkling that he was the subject of their mirth. Her relief showed itself in her accent, as she asked, —

"Watching 'those people' again?"

"No," he replied calmly. "Watching you, and wondering what it was you found so amusing."

Again her eyes wavered.

"I like your Mr. Grieg," she said, a little bit inconsequently. "He seems very much a man, in spite of his smallness."

She coloured hotly, once her careless words were spoken. Side by side, there was not a half-inch difference between Grieg and Clode. And Clode also was so much a man that, recognizing her honest penitence, he could ignore its cause. Instead, he felt a wave of deeper liking for his companion, directly he saw her jarred ever so slightly from her serene

self-mastery. Her petulance had been only another phase of the self-centred whole; her penitence was quite a different matter.

"Grieg is n't my especial property. Yesterday was the first time I had seen him. It doesn't take long, though, to find out what sort he is."

"And to like him." Aileen capped his sentence thoughtfully.

"To like him more than one does most people," Clode gave hearty assent. "He's not a man who needs a crisis for a background. His lines are sharp enough to do without that."

The word had sent Aileen's eyes out across the happy summer sea, bright blue and rippling as a mountain lake, a fit and dainty setting for the wee, translucent flying fish that, all morning long, had risen from before their bows.

"One can't think of crises, such a day as this," she objected. Then she nestled a bit lower in her chair. "But, Mr. Clode, I've been meaning to ask you something, to find out something, rather. As I told you, I could n't help listening, yesterday, when you and Mr. Grieg were talking, and I heard you mention a Mr. Bernie Lennox. The name is n't too common, and I knew somebody, once, who owned it. Do you suppose it could have been the same?" And then she gave an apologetic little laugh. "Is n't this ingenuous on my part? But then, one always hunts for a common acquaintance; it seems to guarantee one."

Clode's eyes had lighted. It was plain to the woman at his side that he had a strong liking for his own Bernie Lennox. For just an instant, the

fact gave her pause; indeed, she half-regretted her own choice of subject. It takes a tactful woman to discuss one man with another, and not err.

"As you say, the name is uncommon," Clode was assenting. "Where did you know him?"

Once more Aileen's eyes rested on the sea, and Clode could not read their message. For just a minute, they held something akin to tenderness, even to regret; then it vanished, and she turned back to him with a smile.

"I beg your pardon. I was trying to see whether I made out a bit of smoke, away over there astern. Where did I meet my Bernie Lennox? Oh, up and down in society, as one does meet people. We both were mere children; he was in Yale at the time, such a nice boy with great brown eyes and the figure of a giant, an athletic one, not a mere monster."

Clode smiled.

"That's Bernie, for a fact. I knew him, myself, just at that epoch. Indeed, I've hardly seen him since; but we were good chums once; and, with such a man as Bernie, that is bound to last."

"You found him so loyal, then?"

Clode's reply ended all discussion.

"Absolutely." And then, man-fashion, after an interval, he reopened it. "Did n't you?"

Her colour came, then faded.

"Really, Mr. Clode, that is a hard question for me to answer. A woman, as she just meets and knows a man, is the last person in the world to judge his loyalty."

Clode spoke too thoughtfully to pay much attention to the woman in the chair beside him. Rather,

for the moment, he was addressing the spirit of the absent Bernie.

"Women, no, perhaps. A woman, yes."

His face, this time, was towards the sea. For one instant, Aileen's eyes made a furtive search of his profile, which was curiously stern, so stern that swiftly she dismissed her initial theory of a personal signification of his words. As a rule, that personal significance had been ubiquitous in her talk with all mankind. She missed it; but she rather liked the missing. Then swiftly she roused herself.

"You knew his romance?" Clode was asking, and his slow accent betrayed to Aileen's ear that he was accusing himself of some disloyalty, in that he put the question to her, three days ago a total stranger.

"I knew —" Clode's self-distrust seemed imparting itself to her, and she spoke with a half-listless hesitation; "a little about it. That is, of course, we all knew something had gone wrong."

Her accent challenged his attention. He eyed her narrowly.

"That was all you knew?" he asked, and once again the curt, impersonal note rang in his voice.

Instinctively she realized the futility of a denial.

"Bernie told me something about it," she confessed.

"Yes? He was ~~very~~ reticent with me. Poor Bernie! It might have been because he knew I was sorry for him, and hated to have me say so."

"Perhaps. One can't tell." For a minute or two, Aileen sat silently plaiting the fringes of her rug. Then she lifted her eyes directly to meet the watching eyes of Clode.

"And I was sorry for the girl," she said.

"You knew her, too?"

She ignored the question.

"Sorriest of all, from the very things that Bernie said."

"Bernie was loyalty itself," Clode said heavily.

"And so was she; only she was loyal, not to Bernie, but to the ideal she had set herself to wait for and to reverence."

"Bernie was as good a man as ever breathed God's air," Clode said, still more heavily.

His companion liked his constancy, yet she opposed him.

"Perhaps. The difference might have been of degree; it might have been only in kind. However, just from what Bernie said, it was evident that, at the very first, she had n't understood him. He was gloriously human, if you will, a splendid young animal with a clever brain. She was also young, shockingly young; she evidently had made the fatal mistake of setting him down a Galahad."

Clode laughed shortly.

"Oh, if it comes to Galahads!" he said.

"Exactly. And I am a few years older than the girl was, and hence I agree with you. To her, though, it made all the difference. Out of that came the catastrophe. Bernie had n't the slightest wish to be a Galahad; and, what was more, he told her so."

Clode gave a little sigh. In it was regret for the unregenerate Bernie, regret, too, for Clode's own vanished and ideal-loving youth.

"Poor old Bernie!" he said thoughtfully.

Aileen, with an abrupt shaking off of her rugs, sat up and faced him.

"Why poor Bernie, and not poor — What was her name, anyway?"

Clode shook his head.

"I doubt if I ever knew. That was Bernie, all over. He always had said that, if ever he was in love, he'd keep it to himself; he hated the idea of turning a girl's name into a text for chaff."

He spoke almost carelessly. However, at his words, Aileen's eyes softened, glittered. Instantly she turned her head and sat gazing steadfastly out to sea; but she felt Clode's eyes upon her during her longish interval of silence. When she did speak again, her voice and manner still were defensive; but it was plain that now she was putting pressure upon herself to maintain the keynote of her earlier mood.

"That was nice of Bernie. Still, after all, it was a good deal like him. But, about the girl: are n't you a little hard on her, Mr. Clode?"

Once more, she felt his eyes upon her. She was totally unaware that, in her last sentence, a note quite new to Clode's experience of her had sounded in her voice. Before, she had been fighting for this nameless girl in Bernie Lennox's remote past. Now she was pleading for her. Clode liked the change. His interest in Aileen Warburton increased with each instant of the crumbling of her well-poised calm. Directly she ceased to be a satisfactory law unto herself, she became attractive. Not that, however, Clode felt the slightest wish to become a law unto her; at least, not yet. He merely liked to see her tugging a little at her self-made moorings. Nevertheless, —

"I'm not hard on the girl at all, Miss Warburton," he asserted temperately. "It's only that she seemed to me rather a cad to throw Bernie over."

"I think she'd have been a worse cad, if she had n't," the girl said hotly.

"I hate a flirt." Then Clode's mouth shut with a snap.

"And I hate a girl who has n't the simple decency to acknowledge that she has made a bad mistake."

"Oh, if it comes to that! Besides, what made her make it, in the first place?"

If glances could stab, Clode would have been a candidate for Christian burial.

"What makes any girl fall in love with any man, Mr. Clode?" Aileen demanded, in wrath too hot to allow her to consider any personal interpretation that might be placed upon her words.

Neither did Clode consider it, as he made grave answer, —

"God knows, Miss Warburton."

And then he looked up, astounded. Aileen, her passing temper vanished, was laughing like a child.

"What solemn nonsense we are talking, Mr. Clode! If we don't look out, too, we shall be quarrelling over the merits of a totally imaginary third person. It would be silly. Besides, it is too fine a day to waste in talking over our theories, especially when they don't fit either each other or the case in hand. Don't you feel inspired to take me up on the top deck? I want to feel the wind in my face, and listen for the spitting of the wireless, over our heads." With a gesture of perfect good-fellowship, she held out her hand to him. Once Clode had helped her to her

feet, though, she promptly changed her mind, and seated herself anew, this time upon the extreme foot of her deck chair, and buried her chin in her cupped palms. "After all, though," she said, with a sudden grave dignity which seemed to Clode incomprehensible, yet very sweet; "I can't help feeling sorry for the girl, if only for the things that Bernie said. He did n't understand her in the least; but I know I understand. She was only a girl, almost a child; she had manufactured an ideal and worshipped it. Bernie was a dear; probably he was the nicest man she had met. As a matter of course, she popped him into the ideal's place, and tried to worship him. At first, it was all right; then she found it was a bad misfit. Bernie was just Bernie, with all sorts of corners and angles that she was n't able to account for, and she did n't worship him in the least. She liked her own ideal any amount better."

Clode, standing beside her, watched her keenly. Then, —

"Well?" he asked, as she came to a pause.

"Then, in common honesty, she had to tell him so."

"Because she had found some one else she liked a little better?" Clode said, with slow, deliberate distinctness.

For one moment and for two, their eyes met, and their natures clashed like steel on steel. Then Aileen's dignity broke up in sudden petulance.

"How merciless you are, Mr. Clode! Can't you see the girl's side, in the least?"

"No," he told her honestly. "I can't."

Still seated, childlike, at his very feet, she flashed

up at him one keen glance that caused the man before her to long for wrappings about his naked soul.

"You mean you won't," she told him mercilessly.

And then, without waiting for Clode to recover from the sudden blow upon his rampant egotism, his equally rampant belief in his own masculine opinions, she rose to her feet and spoke to him from over her shoulder.

"Come," she said. "We'd best be moving, or we sha'n't get back in time for tea."

Despite his struggles to the contrary, Clode found himself walking after her in a silence which bordered on the sulky. It was long since any one had ventured speaking to him in that tone, long that no one had dared point out to him even the most obvious of his faults, let alone a mere uncomfortable eccentricity of his mental make-up. Clode, in his young success, had paid the penalty of his present position of command, paid it to the uttermost farthing, by reason of his total lack of those near relations who feel it their family duty to take it out of the brightest star in the domestic galaxy. Clode had been left to go his ways, unhampered by any curbing criticism save that gained from his own personal examinations. And he did have a bulldog tenacity in sticking to his ground. He did hate to modify his opinions, once they were taken. He did take it very much amiss, when others failed to be coerced into sharing those opinions with him. And Aileen Warburton, knowing him three days, had been shrewd enough to discern the truth, daring enough to tell him of it. However, instead of feeling pleasure that, in showing her penetration, she also had shown her

worthiness for the friendship he was bestowing on her, Clode was conscious of a distinct sense of pique. To a man of acknowledged power and prominence, it is far more pleasant to be accepted as an agreeable whole than as a conglomerate of assorted characteristics, some super-excellent, some very bad. For all their future intercourse, it seemed to him, he would have chosen an Aileen, not of analytic clairvoyance, but an Aileen who would prove, as concerned himself, an all-admiring dunce.

And yet, her phrase had been so short, a scant four words. None the less, it fitted the tip-end of his self-consciousness like a pointed fool's-cap; and, what was more, it refused to be dislodged.

Indeed, for the time being, it quite removed his memory for certain recent workings of his brain, certain new beliefs which, half-subconsciously, had taken root in him, during his talk concerning Bernie.

CHAPTER SIX

AILEEN did not play bridge, that night. Clode saw to that, quietly, masterfully, as was his wont. His afternoon half-hour on the top deck had been a bit unsatisfactory. Aileen had been silent, absent-minded. He himself had been a little resentful. It seemed to him the duty of his manhood to impress upon this new acquaintance that she had undervalued him, and that quite flippantly. Inasmuch as it was the first time Clode had made a conscious effort to mount himself upon a pedestal of haughty dignity, he clambered to it awkwardly and, once on top of it, he hunched himself into an inert and forbidding bundle, lest he should topple over and fall with a crash into his usual friendly mood. And Aileen's silence had nothing at all to do with penitence. Instead, she was busy, thinking of Bernie Lennox and the girl. For the time being, Clode was of no more account than any metronome that marked the rhythm of her steps. Clode, on the contrary, was acutely conscious of her absolute remoteness in matters of the spirit. He wished she would begin to talk.

To such a man as Clode, it was a totally new experience to have an unrelated woman thump him hard upon his besetting sin, and then stroll on beside him, wholly heedless of the racking impact. To Aileen's mind, taking Clode quite out of his traditional environment, there was no especial reason

she should not speak a casual truth to him as well as to any other one of a dozen men on shipboard. Spoken, she accorded it no further thought. She was too busy thinking about Bernie and the girl.

However, after many minutes of pacing silently to and fro, Clode began to feel himself getting cramps upon his pedestal. One's dignity, or, to phrase it quite downrightly, one's egotism is such a wee point in space, viewed from the top deck of a mammoth liner, with the blue sky cupping overhead, and the blue sea rocking and whispering below, while every now and then the air around one crackles and purrs with wireless greetings coming from a stranger ship, invisible somewhere behind the offing. One puts to sea, secure in his individual mastery of universal forces. One lands, considering himself an atom co-important with the briny drop of splashing spray and with the translucent flying fish.

But, meanwhile, Clode was getting a species of mental cramps, and he longed to descend from his haughty eminence of injured dignity; but he was not just sure of the best way to go about it. He tried the most obvious.

"I fear you are finding me dull company," he vouchsafed at length.

The start with which the woman at his side became aware of his existence, this spoke volumes. None the less, she rose to the emergency and fibbed suavely.

"Not at all. Now and then, I think we all find it restful to keep still," she said. And then, casting her memories of Bernie overboard, she smiled at the

man beside her. "Is n't silence the supreme test, after all?"

The words were largely automatic, the kind of phrase which shapes itself on any well-trained tongue. Nine men out of every ten would have taken it at its face value, and thought no more about it. Clode was the tenth, however. Aileen's quick eyes saw him wince and draw back a little, as if from too insistent an advance. Swiftly she retrieved her error. She liked Clode in spite of herself. Her first glance at him in its half-veiled antagonism had yet paid its homage to the man's inherent right to command respect.

Now, without an instant's hesitation, her laugh came, frank and merry.

"Don't I say the bromidic thing nicely, Mr. Clode? And yet, there's a grain of truth in most trite sayings. Perhaps that is the very thing that makes them trite in the first place. But, really, after you have talked yourself quite out, it is very restoring to walk and absorb ozone, and let your wits take care of themselves. One can't do it with just everybody, though." And now her thoughtful intonation quite deadened Clode's consciousness to the fact that she was merely repeating her earlier statement in less formal phrase.

That was the Aileen Warburton of it, though. To have modified her statement would have been to have confessed herself in error, and confessed errors were tactical blunders, according to her code. Penitence was a becoming attitude, but only when it had no justification in the fact.

Begun, the talk went on by fits and starts. Aileen

made heroic steps to bridge the silence, while Clode kept a wary eye and ear upon the deck below him, awaiting signs and sounds of tea. It was with a wave of intense relief that he beheld Stanway's sombre cap and beakish nose appearing in the distance. Stanway bore down upon them in a fashion that betrayed his intention of having Miss Warburton's society at any cost; and treading carefully at Stanway's heels was an unclassifiable youth in buttons, bearing two cups of tea. Stanway hailed them affably.

"They told me you were here, and I came to look you up, and bring the tea. I hope it's not too cold; it's rather nice to have it here, away from all the rabble. Sorry there's not a cup for you, Mr. Clode," Stanway knew to a nicety the discriminating effect to be gained out of a *Mister*; "but the fellow only had a pair of hands. Will you send him back after more?"

Clode's soul rent him at the *Mister*; but he controlled himself with some heroism and, suppressing an ardent longing to pitch Stanway overboard to become food for the flying fishes, he gave the negative reply for which the lonely relict was so plainly wishing. That done, he nodded curtly to Miss Warburton, turned on his heel, and went down the stairs.

Instead of another cup of tea, however, he sought his cabin, opened his trunk, and fell to digging in it. His face, meanwhile, wore the absorbed expression of a dog digging out a mole; precisely like the dog, too, he dug for the thing itself, regardless of the attendant ruin of surrounding objects. At length,

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his fingers closed upon a small blank book and a packet of letters; and then Clode, flinging himself upon his cabin sofa, sought to lose himself in abstruse calculations which concerned his business. Instead, though, he balked at a sum of seven and nine and five, lost the connection, and wondered vaguely whether large grey eyes betokened — And some women were so unforgiving, especially of insults to their fancied dignity.

Clode dropped his book and clasped his hands behind his head, while he lost himself in wonderings wholly alien to his past experience. Five minutes later, he was sitting in a deck chair next to Mrs. General.

Aileen vanished, shortly after tea, and was seen no more till dinner. Despite the charms of the top deck and of an appreciative companion whose talk never became frankly personal, nor yet lost a delicate flavour of something that only his extreme good breeding kept from becoming personal: in spite of these attractions, Aileen was conscious of an overwhelming wish for Marie. Marie was an adoring slave; her retreating back never took on unpleasant angles. And Clode's back had looked distinctly forbidding as, obedient to Stanway's hint, he had gone tramping away in search of a hypothetical cup of tea. She told herself that she had no idea what was the matter; but she was not in the least deceived by her own assertion. For three whole days, Stanway and Clode had been waiting at her beck and call. Their devotion was monotonous. It made her long for some sort of a fray; and her last talk with Clode, distinctly provocative as it was, had been

born of that longing. The clash, though, when it came, had made her anxious. She wished a skirmish, not a war. Above all, she wished to come out victorious. The angle of Clode's departing back had made her nervous. Far more imperturbable than she, he had given her no hint of the galling pressure of the foolscap she had fitted to his egotism.

At dinner, she emerged, meekly radiant, from the hands of Marie. As she came down the stairs and into the dining-room, she smiled appealingly at Clode, smiled gratefully at Stanway who, rising, whirled her chair into position; then, turning to Mrs. General, she smiled again at her, this time with the quick enthusiasm of an eager, deprecating child. And then, over Mrs. General's shoulder, she caught a glimpse of Grieg standing in the doorway, and, her slow smiles forgotten, she tossed him a nod of frank and merry greeting. Clode, watching, shut his teeth askew. Was it all emblematic of the girl? Was her charm only one quarter honest, genuine? Had she a sincere kernel to her nature; or was she merely a clever intellect, playing a game of smiles?

Despite his questionings, however, he cornered her, as she was going out of the room, after dinner.

"Where are your rugs?" he asked her. "Mrs. General is coming up to the top deck, to watch the moon."

She shook her head, with the wilful misunderstanding of a freakish child.

"Poor lady! Has n't she any of her own? Take mine, of course."

His eyes swept over her, in calm supremacy. It was his moment.

"I expect to," he said coolly. "You'll need them. Can I ask your maid for a long coat?"

Her eyes danced mockingly.

"I doubt its fitting you."

He brushed her words aside.

"You can't go up on deck in that gown. It would be ruined, to say nothing of your health. Night air at sea is cold. Where is your maid?"

"Oh, if I must." Her eyes gleamed for a second time. "Mr. Stanway, do you feel as if you could go in search of Marie, Sixty-seven, please, and ask her for my coat? We'll wait for you here."

Clode interposed.

"Excuse me. Stanway, I'll get the coat. Mrs. General is waiting for you in the lounge. I told her we would be up for coffee, and I took the liberty of saying you would join us. Now, Miss Warburton?"

In the end, Aileen herself went in search of Marie and the coat. As she went down the narrow alley leading to her cabin, she confessed to herself that she had been outgeneralled. She also confessed to herself that she possessed a wholesome admiration for a man who could produce so apt and spontaneous a fib to act as his lieutenant.

Reappearing with the coat across her arm and a scarf dangling from her hand, she continued to be outgeneralled. Without a wasted word, Clode took the coat, deftly twisted the scarf around her bare pink shoulders, and led the way up to the lounge where he settled her in the one chair of the group which left her wholly to his conversational mercies. In the same masterful fashion, once they were on the

top deck, he kept her standing until Mrs. General was seated, with Stanway on his black-striped rug beside her. Then he made up the remainder of the group to his own satisfaction.

And Aileen, wrapped in her long, light coat and swaddled in rugs, turned to the man seating himself beside her and bestowed on him a slow and searching glance. The moon, full in his face, showed that his lips were shut tight, his eyes shining with the light of victory. Accordingly, she balked, ignored his conversational asides, and talked across him to Stanway and the placid Mrs. General. What was worse, she fell to telling riddles, not metaphorical riddles of the universe, but actual riddles that concerned the moon.

Clode hated riddles. He judged them foolish. Moreover, his egotism was still smarting from the blow she had given to it, a blow more deadly by reason of its apparently careless aim. One could not term it criticism. He was well aware she could not take it back; but he felt that she might add a few mitigating touches. Instead, she asked Stanway, Stanway the black-bound minor poet, whether he knew the difference between the moon and a box of snuff.

Clode went to bed, that night, wondering if his vaunted dominance were anything but a theory of the advertising columns and the hoardings. As he reviewed the day, he had a haunting consciousness that, hour by hour, he had been downed. What was more, instead of giving thanks for the broadening influence of the new experience, he talked to his pillows undevoutly for the space of half an hour.

Next morning, of fell purpose, he absented himself from breakfast. It was Sunday, and a perfect morning, the sort of day one sings about in hymns. Clode longed to be up and doing on the topmost deck, his nose to the tanging breeze, not lurking in his cabin like a seasick worm. However, counting up the attributes of women as he had diagnosed them out of his past experience, he judged that an unexplained absence on his own part would be punitive, and hence corrective as concerned Miss Aileen Warburton. That Miss Aileen Warburton deserved correction, his memories of her conduct with the stricken Stanway, on the top deck the night before: these memories left him no doubt.

Unhappily, though, in making up his plans, Clode had reckoned without Haydock. Haydock, with his vocal cords in perfect working order, knocked at his door precisely at the wonted time.

"Bath is ready, Mr. Clode."

Clode, aware of the thinness of the cabin walls, and equally aware that Aileen had not yet left her room, murmured inaudibly.

"What say, sir?" Haydock queried; and, from his accent, the query might as well have been addressed to the men in the cro'nest.

Clode repeated his murmur. His effort to keep its exact import from the ears of his neighbour opposite: this lent a minor cadence to his words.

Haydock caught the cadence, not the words. To a man of his experience, words, in like crisis, were insignificant; it was the cadence only that a bedroom steward was supposed to heed. Haydock's voice swiftly became jaunty.

"Oh, not sick, sir? That would be too bad, a morning such as this. The sea is like a duckpond."

From the cabin opposite, there came a muffled thud, and then a silence. It was as if some one, intently listening, had dropped inadvertently some small object, perchance a hair brush. Not that anybody needed to listen intently, though, when it was Haydock who was speaking.

This time, Clode's reply was audible.

"Not sick, you —" then he bethought himself; "exactly," he added, with a falling cadence which he judged to be charity-compelling.

Haydock's voice became urgent.

"And your bath, sir?"

So interested had Clode become in the pathetic part he was playing to the gallery across the way, that now he shook his head in silent abnegation, quite ignoring the fact that Haydock's eyes, unlike his voice, could not well penetrate the fabric of the cabin door.

Haydock, outside the door, increased in urgency.

"Then you won't bath, sir?"

"No," and the self-pity now was capitally done; "not yet."

Haydock's ear took the self-pity as a genuine affair.

"Sorry, sir. Shall I bring you a cup of tea?"

"No!" Clode spoke with the utter loathing awakened in American digestive apparatus by the thought of cups of tea taken at unseemly hours. "Just let me be. I shall be better soon."

Outside the door, Haydock shook his sparsely-thatched grey crown, and smiled comprehendingly

at the window-ledge beside him, that window-ledge so cunningly devised for holding trays and other implements of nursing. The smile appeared to be a sufficient safety-valve, however, for Haydock's feelings; his voice would have wooed a reluctant child into the arms of a waiting dentist, as he said cajolingly,—

"Best let me bring you a wee dose of Mother Sill, Mr. Clode. That will fetch you straight in no time."

"Mother *Who?*"

"Mother Sill's Seasick Remedy," Haydock explained.

And then Clode's exasperation downed his desire to abolish himself from Aileen Warburton's ken. He let off a healthy roar of rage.

"Oh, go to the devil, Haydock! I'm not seasick. Get away and let me have a little rest!" Then he bethought himself of his earlier utterances, and he modulated swiftly from an *open diapason* in the major to a *vox humana* in a D flat minor. "All I need is a little bit of rest. My —" Clode hesitated. To a man healthy as an ox, it is not easy to choose one's ailments cannily; "my head does n't feel quite right, this morning."

"Exactly, sir." And now Haydock's voice indicated the extreme of comprehension. "I know. One often feels that way, of a morning. Some takes a B. and S. for it; but, for my part, I think it's best just to lie up a bit and wait."

It seemed to Clode, listening to Haydock's retreating step, listening to the tapping of the stewardess at Miss Warburton's door, listening to the

silken rustle that followed the stewardess down the passage: it seemed to Clode that the cup of his misery was filled to the brim and dripping untidily all over the surrounding landscape. Better, he told himself, far better to be the victim of an experienced coquette of the most pronounced description; better to be led, like a tame dancing bear, the length and breadth of the good ship *Beatic*, obedient to the whim of Miss Aileen Warburton, than to be an egotist, caught in the meshes of his own plot to win her respectful interest, caught and exposed in his own supernal egotism.

For Clode, since the afternoon before, had suddenly settled to the belief that he was an egotist of the most pronounced description. He had not thought of it before. Indeed, he had not, at least not consciously, thought much about himself, one way or the other. He had made it his rule to adopt the course he judged the right one. Then he bent all things in heaven and earth to its accomplishment. Accomplished, he pigeon-holed it in its proper place in his experience, and gave thanks accordingly. It was the shrine at which those thanks were offered that told the story, a story suddenly annotated by the comment of his yellow-headed fellow-passenger.

Up to this time, Clode had never thought it worth his while to pose. He had been too busy, doing direct things in a direct fashion. But that same yellow-headed fellow-passenger, Miss Aileen Warburton, by her impartial smiles directed upon everything masculine in sight, everything from the white-haired General to the scarlet-headed Tommy Owens, had goaded him into posing, in order to focus upon him-

self the smiles which he yet despised himself for coveting. Clode had no desire either to flirt with Aileen, or to fall in love with her. Women were cloying creatures, even taken at their best. His life and interests were full enough, without them. And yet, just for the present hour and place, he liked Aileen; why, he could not say. Moreover, he liked to have her wayward attentions directed on himself. And some tag-end of psychology, left over from his senior year in college, assured him that, for such focussing, a bit of inexplicable absence furnished a good lens. Only —

He ground his teeth with a literalness that caused them to squeak audibly. His absence, to be effective, should be from a nameless cause, not the ignoble result of seasick qualms or a next-morning head. He ground his teeth again, and kicked the blanket savagely, the while he listened to the silken rustle coming up the passage towards him. Then he held his breath to listen. Haydock was speaking from afar; but his voice was plainly audible, despite the distance.

“Good-morning, Miss Warburton! You’re looking fine, this morning. I wish they were all as well as you, and had your courage. Poor Mr. Clode is feeling very ill, very ill indeed. I fancy he may be more delicate than he looks. That kind often are. But he’s a brave one, a good, brave sort; and he’s fighting hard to down it. It’s the only way, once the bile gets the upper hand; just fight it down. Fancy, he tried to make me think it was nothing but too much drink, last night! Him, steady as a die, and a teetotaller, for anything I’ve seen to the

contrary! He's good as gold; but virtue is n't any cure for seasickness, after all. Once you've got it on you, you've no call to stop in your berth, singing psalms; you've got to get out in the fresh air. Well, it's a fine day, and I'm glad you're feeling fine, to meet it." And the voice ceased, and the swishing rustle came up along the passage and went out behind the closing of the door.

Two hours later, Clode, a bit sneakily, entered the dining-room. At the end, beyond the captain's table, the purser was reading prayers from the open book which rested on the silken Union Jack before him. Beside him sat the members of the *Beatic's* orchestra; on either hand were grouped the stewards of the choir. And even Clode's irritated nerves yielded to the influence of the historic words, yielded to the virile, reverent voice which read them.

Be pleased to receive into thy Almighty protection the ship in which we sail.

The words fell into a silence broken only by the quiet washing of the sea, as it slid softly by them underneath the open ports, fell into Clode's mind with a new significance, born of their unfamiliar setting. Beside all the rest of it, his mood of the morning seemed so petty, so undignified. Yes, even so totally irreverent. In comparison with the softly-swelling, softly-whispering, yet mighty sea, in comparison with the vast ship that gently rocked upon it, breathing like a sentient thing, he felt himself the merest atom, negligible, save in so far as he filled his allotted niche in the whole vast, universal plan, a human keystone, perchance, of some tiny arch which, in its turn, supported other arches,

foundation of a possible structure on which some latter-day Colossus might take his stand. Instinctively, Aileen forgotten, Clode straightened his shoulders to bear the strain, straightened them again, as the orchestra stirred and the choir of stewards rose up in their places.

“Who bidd’st the mighty ocean deep
Its own appointed limits keep.”

And then, in an instant, his sense of cosmic responsibility was shattered.

Down in the front rank of the congregation, Stanway and Aileen were singing from a common hymnal, she with all her woman’s heart and soul, he quite discreetly, sadly, as became his recent mourning.

In the farther corner of the room, Clode’s jaws closed with a snap, and his ears shut themselves to the haunting melody. He merely stood and glowered at the carpet.

CHAPTER SEVEN

NEVERTHELESS, Aileen, dressing for dinner, that same night, could hear Clode, in his cabin, booming away to himself like a mammoth and contented bee,—

“With grateful hearts mm hm mm hm
Mm hm mm mm — ’ring gale.”

Aileen, listening, smiled up at Marie by way of the mirror which they both were facing. After all, it was good to hear the man, good to know a man big and broad enough to draw his own content out of things like sea and sky and rising wind, out of man-talk, terse and impersonal. To the girl’s tired nerves, Clode, humming in his room, seemed of the same dimension as the huge ship beneath her, as the twilight sea whose pulses already were quickening with premonition of a coming storm.

All day long, that Sunday, Aileen had had no speech with Clode. She had seen him in his place at luncheon; had seen him, later, pacing up and down one of the lower decks, with Grieg beside him; but neither time had it been possible to exchange a nod.

Aileen, that day, had been driven to cover at Mrs. General’s protecting side. Stanway had joined her in the dining-room, just as service was beginning. He had shared her hymnal with her, had complicated her kneeling by the amount of floor

space which his bereavement had appeared to be demanding of him. The other men at the service, Aileen took heedful note with the uncovered portion of her countenance, assumed more tentative attitudes of devotion. Stanway, relatively speaking, grovelled on the floor, in token of his lonely misery.

He arose from his devotions, chastened, yet cheerful; but he forcibly annexed Aileen as a permanent companion, bore her away to the relative isolation of the upper promenade, and fell to telling her about his wife, not his wife in her fullest bloom, but his wife during the last stages of her earthly pilgrimage. Aileen was patient and sympathetic. Nevertheless, when a black-rimmed handkerchief came into evidence, she suddenly bethought herself that it was time to watch the life-boat drill.

"I always feel it safer, you know," she explained to Stanway, by way of throwing her suggestion into harmony with its melancholy context. "Then, if anything does happen, I know exactly which boat to choose."

Stanway courteously permitted himself to be diverted from his misery.

"The one that has the largest stewards to man it, I suppose," he said.

"Not a bit. I always pick for the little ones; they're pluckiest," Aileen assured him ruthlessly.

Moreover, considering the fact that, as she spoke, her eyes were on the backs of two heads, one black, one ashy-grey, just vanishing in the offing, it was no great wonder that Stanway, listening, winced.

Possibly it was in a mood of retribution that,

boat-drill ended, he recurred to the subject of his wife, not pathetically now, but dwelling with no small degree of pride upon her physical perfections and her social charms, above all, upon her dark, dark hair and her unfailing tact. Then it was that Aileen threw up the conversational sponge, and demanded to be consigned to the care of Mrs. General.

Mrs. General, bored without her husband who was taking forty winks after the moral exhaustion of the morning service, received her self-made charge with every manifestation of lively pleasure. However, she was forced to receive Stanway, too; and Stanway, for convenience in talking to them both at once, sat himself down on the foot of Mrs. General's chair in a casual fashion quite at variance with his recent signs of mourning.

Aileen, secure in the sense of temporary chaperonage and in the consciousness of social duty done, left the talk in the hands of Mrs. General. She liked Stanway. He had brains and manners, and his step suited hers to perfection. None the less, a little of him went a long, long way. He was as fond of useless iteration as were the decadent poets he so much affected. Three days, apparently, had taught Aileen the full gamut of the emotions awakened in him by the sea, had taught her the exact sequence of crises which had culminated in the death of the recent Mrs. Stanway; had taught her his many hesitations in the face of the problem whether the mature choice, born of his late bereavement, would lead him to become a Shakespeare or a Napoleon. She still had one cause for thankfulness, however.

As yet, she had warded off any suggestion that she listen to his reading of his manuscript productions. Nevertheless, she knew that it was bound to come, some day.

Now, however, she left Mrs. General to bear the brunt of Stanway's conversation, while she lay back at ease and let her half-shut eyes and senses rest themselves on the shimmering expanse of sea, now roughening and greying a little, as the curly plumes of cloud went slithering across the blue-grey arch above. Low down on the horizon, other clouds were banking, greyish white and soft as the breasts of the gulls following the *Beatic's* stern. The raucous chatter of the gulls mingled pleasantly with the other sounds of life at sea: the swishing of the water underneath their keel, the whirring of the breeze in the wireless rigging overhead, the ceaseless tramp of feet upon the deck before them, and, every now and then, the striking of the deep-toned bell that marked the hours. And, despite the bell, time might well have ceased. Out in that glorious, wind-swept space, there was no need to separate and mark the hours, no sense of time, save for the alternating swing from dark to dawn.

For the once, Stanway's monotone was falling on deaf ears. Instead, there came an instant, new in the life of Aileen Warburton, when, lying in her deck chair, her eyes upon the greying, panting sea, her ears filled with the wind-song of all ages, crossed every now and then by the sombre bell that cried out the hours across the listening waters: there came an instant when she realized that she had touched and known eternity. Knowing it, she felt an over-

powering longing for some one to share that knowledge with her. That some one was not Stanway, though. Of so much, she was convinced.

None the less, it was Stanway's voice that roused her, Stanway's voice speaking about Clode. Eternity dropped back to its usual place at the end of a long perspective.

"He seems a good sort," Stanway was saying thoughtfully; "only so very practical. If I were to define the man, I'd say he had plenty of ideas, and not an ideal to his name."

Aileen leaped into the talk.

"Who is that?" she demanded curtly, although she was quite well aware who was the subject of Stanway's strictures.

"You have waked up, Miss Warburton?"

"I was n't asleep."

"Only dreaming?" His smile attracted her, in spite of herself, as he put the question.

"Yes. No. I am not sure. It is n't easy to tell just what one really does, when one is watching the sea."

Stanway's dark eyes lost their self-conscious melancholy, deepened, grew thoughtful.

"Just loses one's self, and becomes a part of it; that is about all."

Aileen looked up at him in sharp surprise.

"You, too?" she said.

"Yes. One is n't supposed to say too much about it, though; at least, not on the top deck of a liner." He laughed; and Aileen, watching and listening, told herself that the laugh showed a natural man and likable, who heretofore had been overlaid with self-

conscious fripperies which he misnamed his dignity. Now, all at once, his tone rang true. "Have n't you learned, Miss Warburton," and she welcomed the note of honest sarcasm; "that it is mannerly to express an ocean voyage in terms of chicken broth, and the number of times one walks around the deck, and bridge?"

She nodded.

"To most people, yes. Still, there are exceptions, I suppose." Then she dismissed her subject sharply, and harked back to her former question. "Whom are you two people discussing?"

"Clode."

"Do you think you are quite fair to him?" she demanded a bit shortly; why shortly, though, she did not trouble herself to ascertain.

"Yes, I think so." With a leisurely gesture, Stanway transferred his long person from the foot of Mrs. General's chair to the one on Aileen's other side. "Clode interests me a good deal," he added then. "I've never known anybody just like him before."

His accent was a trifle condescending. It irritated Aileen.

"He seems to me quite normal," she replied and, to save herself, she could not have kept the hauteur from her tone.

Stanway showed himself quite unruffled by it.

"That is just it, Miss Warburton. He is normal, distressingly normal, a good specimen of our American business type. Of course, I have eyed him by the hundred. It's only that I never have lived with one of him before."

"I did n't know that you were living with Mr. Clode," Aileen said drily.

"In a superficial sense, yes. Thanks to you, we seem to have drifted into the same little party." Stanway brushed a bit of lint from the black stripe on his sleeve. "Clode rather interests me, I confess," he added then, a little languidly.

With difficulty, Aileen downed her rising temper. Clode was nothing to her but a semi-antagonistic acquaintance of a few days' standing. There was no reason in the world she should fight his battles, least of all against Stanway, who, divested of his melancholy accoutrements, had all the hallmarks of belonging to her own world. Clode, on the other hand — And yet, it had been Clode, not Stanway, who had known Bernie Lennox. Still, college friendships did not count for much; they were no fitting groundwork for an offensive and defensive alliance; and Clode, besides, looked quite able to fight his own battles without help from her. Therefore, —

"In what way?" she queried calmly.

Her pause had been longer than she knew. Stanway showed perplexity at her question. His dark eyes on the sea, he apparently had lost all recollection of the subject of their talk. She repeated her question insistently.

"In what way does Mr. Clode interest you?"

"Oh, yes. I beg your pardon. Clode? In all sorts of ways. He is a man of such evident brains and power; and yet, as you watch him, you can't help feeling it all is rather wasted."

Aileen turned in her chair to face him with a little smile.

"But I can," she contradicted.

Stanway sat bolt upright, pulling his cap well forward to keep the dazzle from his eyes.

"Clode might be anything," he argued.

"Yes," she assented; but her grey eyes looked defiant. "Well, what is he?"

Stanway dropped his hands, palms out.

"Who knows? A good business man; hardware, for a guess. Under some conditions, he might have developed into what it's the fashion nowadays to call a captain of industry. As it is," he folded his hands across his knee; then he added, "a corporal, perhaps."

"How do you know?" This time, Aileen's accent betrayed her.

Stanway looked at her steadily. She felt her colour rising, her cheeks burning and throbbing underneath his level gaze. It was absolutely respectful; yet somehow it did not match the mourning stripe upon his arm.

"I beg your pardon," he said quietly. "I did not know that you and Clode were friends."

She winced a little, and drew a bit closer to the protecting elbow of Mrs. General, now deep in her novel and miles away from her companions. Then she spoke with the full dignity of her two and thirty years, the dignity which had bidden her to put to sea, alone, unchaperoned save by Marie in the background, and to fear nothing.

"I wish we were; but it is too soon yet to tell, for I only saw Mr. Clode after we had left New York. I admire him, though, in ever so many ways; and he has my full respect."

Stanway liked her manner and liked her words. According to his standards, he gave to them his full support.

"Clode is certainly a man of splendid possibilities," he said.

His sincerity was apparent, equally apparent his limitations. Aileen's dignity vanished in a wild desire to laugh. She controlled herself bravely, though.

"But not of actualities? Poor Mr. Clode!"

Stanway shook his head.

"Not in the same way that we — would like to be," he said. "He has n't a bad thing about him. It's only that he is so absolutely — er — mundane."

"Most of us are," Aileen suggested.

"Yes; but — he reads detective stories, and he plays bull with those Sedalia people, and —"

Aileen interrupted.

"In short, he is a healthy man, enjoying himself in his own way," she said.

If it was Stanway's turn to wince, at least he did not show it to her watchful eyes.

"And with his own kind," he answered.

"Thank you." Aileen's laugh roused Mrs. General from her book. "You will have to include me in the category, as long as Mr. Clode and I usually have our tea together; and your accent was most disparaging." Then, with a swift change of mood, she added thoughtfully, "But, after all, Mr. Clode's manner shows that he is in a position where he is accustomed to command and, what is more, to have his word obeyed."

Stanway settled back again into his chair.

"Oh, as for that, it is only a question of sheer will," he said. "If you doubt it, look at the fellow's jaw."

And then Aileen suddenly remembered that she needed to see Marie. Marie seen, though, Marie's mistress remained invisible until almost the very end of luncheon.

Stanway caught her, as she came up the stairs. He was smiling eagerly; and his voice had the same true ring which, two hours earlier, had aroused her first belief that he might prove to be something more than the good-looking bundle of conventions and superciliousness which had met her eye against the background of the Narrows.

"I have been asking favours of the captain," he said alertly.

Her brows lifted themselves.

"You are leaving our table, then?"

"Miss Warburton!"

"Most people like to sit at the captain's table," she reminded him maliciously.

"The ingenuous ones on their first trip, who believe it is a mere matter of official invitation." He shrugged his shoulders. "Really, it is n't fair to include me in that list."

"One never knows. The most unlikely people are dazzled by the theoretical glories of the position. I've seen old stagers quite as eager as the new recruits. There's a glamour about shiny buttons; we all of us feel it."

"So I noticed, yesterday," Stanway observed.

Her answering laugh was frankly girlish. Her own sincerity answered to the call of his, and, for

the time, she met him with a simple friendliness which seemed to him extremely winning.

"That must be Mr. Grieg," she said. "Yes, he is nice and shiny; but there is more to him than mere buttons. However, we can cry quits. But, if you are n't moving up to the top table, what then?"

"Merely that I've asked the captain if I may take you up into the peak of the ship, to watch the sunset. He grumbled; but I gave him my word of honour that I would n't let you blow away."

"You know him?"

"As one knows a bronze safety device in human attire. I've crossed with him, any number of times."

"You know him to talk to, then? Is he —"

"I know him to bow at — from very afar." Then Stanway's accent changed. "And I know him to admire exceedingly. He is too official to be quite human; but that's a grand sort of failing, after all." Then, his passing tribute ended, his accent changed again. "Will you come? I've been there once; it was unspeakable."

"He said I might?"

And Stanway made answer, like a little boy, —

"I should n't be asking you, if he had n't."

In spite of her heavy coat and the great blue scarf wound about and about her head, Aileen was shivering, when she came back to Mrs. General's side, that afternoon. And Mrs. General, looking placidly up from above her cup of tea, was conscious of a little shock, as she saw the girl's scarlet cheeks and wide-dilated eyes.

"What have you been doing, my dear?" she demanded a bit hastily.

Aileen liked Mrs. General. Now, though, her eyes rested upon the older woman as if she had been quite transparent.

"Oh, just leaning over the bows, to watch the sunset," she answered, with what she hoped was calm indifference.

Her voice was anything but calm, though. Mrs. General looked at her anxiously, at Stanway with severity. Stanway's hawk-like face was flushed a little; his eyes, too, were bright. Poor Mrs. General, in all her comfortable, buxom life, had never heard the imperative summons of the sea, the call it gives to those whose ears are attuned to hear and, hearing, heed. Wherefore, Mrs. General drew conclusions of her own sort. Moreover, she approved.

"Anyway," she said cosily; "you look as if you had been having a wonderfully good time. Now sit down, dear, and let Mr. Stanway get you a cup of tea. You'll find it very —"

What she would find it, Aileen never knew. Her eyes had sought those of Stanway, in one look of utter consternation. Tea! After that magical half-hour that they had spent together! She drew in one long, long breath; and Stanway, quite unthinkingly, copied the breath. And Mrs. General, watching, drew yet more conclusions. Her manner to Aileen became quite unctuous with its efforts to express her comprehension. Poor Mrs. General! Her very benevolence was an index of her limitations.

Refusing tea, Aileen murmured an excuse, and went down to her cabin. It was a relief to her that

she met no one on her way, a relief when she had locked her door and flung herself upon her bed. Her clasped hands were pressed across her eyes, shutting out the light; but nothing could shut out the memory of the dazzle and the glitter, of the fierce excitement of the rising wind, the flying spray; above all, of the knowledge that, just on a line with where she stood, the giant ship was cutting her way into the measureless, trackless sea, cleaving her passage through the plastic, pulsing waters which would part before her, and close in again behind, leaving no mark to show where the monster ship, ripe product of the best thought of the ages, had scarred their surface and gone on her way. Aileen was an atom on the ship, the ship an atom on the restless sea. Just such human beings as Aileen had built the ship, mastered the sea. And the sea, unheeding, let them pass and quietly closed in the gap behind their keel. And this quiet and impassive tolerance of their passing was the thing which human beings vaunted as their mastery. Like some men who, giving temporary wills their way, yet ended with a total dominance.

Aileen lay very still, when that thought came upon her.

A moment later, though, it vanished in renewed excitement. The sun had been dropping towards the clouds low in the westward, when Stanway had sent her to her room to get her heavy coat and scarf. He had been waiting for her on the stairs, had led the way out on deck and forward till they reached the rail that parts the promenade from the fore-castle. A word to the seaman on guard opened the little gate. Together, Stanway and Aileen passed

through, and, with their passing, the memory of the world who drink tea and live in deck chairs fell away from them.

The wind was blowing sharply as, hand in hand like children, they ran up across the deck, scrambled over the low barrier midway in their course, and then staggered on more slowly, forward, upward, until port and starboard rails met before them, and, blown and breathless, they halted in the peak.

Far, far astern, the sun was setting, scarlet, in a bed of copper and sulphur clouds. Above, the bits of scattered cloud showed rosy pink against the darkening blue. And the spanless arch of darkening blue swept over them, over the infinite sea, over the finite ship, over the two human atoms, man and woman, clinging in her bows, swept over them to lose itself in the other infinite, the line where sea met sky, somewhere so far ahead of them that it was beyond the brain of man to grasp the level distance. Out of level distance swept the world-old, world-encircling wind. Under their bows, the cut waves parted, hissing, and came flying up far, far above them, to fall again in mimic rainbows, gay with the glory of the setting sun, buoyant with the utter joyousness of the unconquered sea.

And together, where ship and sea were meeting, where before them lay nothing but the trackless deep, lit by the same sun, buffeted by the same breeze, wetted with the same salt spray, filled and thrilled and throbbing with the same sense of majesty: there stood the two of them, Stanway and Aileen, alone together and facing out across the pathless plain before them.

That night, when he came to dinner, Stanway's black studs were missing.

All that evening, however, Aileen was invisible, nor could he find her, search as he would. He did not take the trouble to look down in the dining-room which he regarded as the haunt of stewards in their off-duty hours. For the once, Stanway missed his reckoning. Not a steward was to be seen; but, in one corner, Aileen and Mrs. General, with Grieg beside them, were passing the evening in unbroken silence.

Clode was at the piano, playing.

CHAPTER EIGHT

NEXT day, Fate, disguised as weather, intervened in any plans which might have been maturing in the brains of Clode and Stanway. There was a sharp little storm during the night, the storm which had been brewing in the glories of the sunset. Its practical outcome was a trifle inglorious to certain human beings on the *Beatic*; and when Aileen, invigorated by her violent tubbing and by the extra ozone of the morning, stepped out of her cabin, she was met by Haydock, long-faced, but with mirth lurking in the corners of his keen blue eyes.

"You're looking in fine trim, this morning, Miss Warburton. You liked the grapes that Mr. Grieg was sending? That kind does n't get taken to the tables; they're just special ones for the chief steward's pets. He sent some in to Sixty-five; but poor Mr. Clode is very sick, this morning, very sick. He's lying quiet now, and I hope the worst is over. Oh, that's all right." For Aileen laid a warning finger on her lip, and pointed expressively at the opposite door. "They never pay much attention to outside things, when they are feeling as he seems to be. But that other gentleman, the one with the black edgings in number Seventy-six, he wanted you to be told he had a little headache, this morning, from using his eyes too late, last night." Haydock, speaking, delivered himself of a portentous wink. "If he feels

better and able to bear the light on deck, he hopes he'll find you out there at noon."

Aileen, passing on her way, pondered the message with some degree of care. Of course, something had to be allowed for the impressive fashion in which it was Haydock's joy to give a message. Nevertheless, she saw no reason that Stanway should be sending a message to her in any case. They had made no plan for the morning. Planless, there was no sense in his seeking to engage her for any hour that suited him. On ship, one took one's chances, dropping into the next deck chair when it happened to be vacant. Surely, Stanway knew the game well enough to realize he must play it quite according to the code. In spite of the allowed margin of Haydock, Aileen, going down to breakfast, was conscious of a dim sense of disappointment in Stanway.

Twenty-four hours earlier, it would not have mattered in the least to her if Stanway had broken all the laws of society ashore and afloat. Up to that time, he had been to her a mere automaton, a stop-gap, a presentable being who talked platitudes and played bridge. Then, all at once, he had showed the human being shut inside of the machine, and her indifference had been broken across with glimmerings of liking, a liking that had mastered her completely while they had stood together in the bow, sharing the glory of wind and sea, of sky and sunset. After that experience, she had scarcely looked for him to be banal quite so soon. The reversion to type was too sudden to be altogether pardonable. And the excuse of eyes! Bah! Why could n't the

man confess the ignoble truths of his digestion, and be done with it?

To Aileen, the rolling of the ship was the merest child's play, compared to the storms she had encountered. She had been quite astonished at the substance of Haydock's bulletins. Her astonishment increased, as she went into the dining-room. Two other women were at the tables, and there was a conspicuous thinning of the ranks of men. Her own table was totally deserted; and her amused disgust at the narrow limits of human courage was increased by a lusty hail from a Sedalian, seated just inside the door, —

“Wa'al! I'll bet on you, every time!”

For an instant, Aileen's chin rose. Then she laughed out irrepressibly. Why not? Incense was sweet to her, no matter whose the hand that placed the joss-sticks; and the foularded women apparently had joined the invisible majority. Besides, the man meant well; and one could be decent without committing one's self to anything particular thereby. At least, that had always been Aileen's theory. She reckoned without knowledge of her Sedalian, and she nodded in gracious acceptation of his tribute.

Notwithstanding her solitude, Aileen made a plentiful breakfast. Then, after an instant's hesitation, she went to her cabin for a novel. It would be good, she told herself, to have a long, restful morning in her deck chair, reading and dreaming and sorting out the plans which she had left, half-formed, at sailing, secure in the leisure of her voyage to fill them out far more satisfactorily than she could have done in the flurry of her hasty departure. And

her novels! She had brought a round dozen of them on board, just the books which she had missed reading and longed to know. She had wondered if she had laid in a sufficient quantity of them to keep her busy throughout her lonely voyage. She smiled a little now, as she ran her finger across their accusing backs. She had read seven chapters of the first one, her first day out; but, for the life of her, she could not now recall what those seven chapters were all about. She smiled again, as she looked at her workbag. She had told Marie to put it within easy reach, for she would need it constantly. It hung exactly in the spot where Marie had placed it. The wrinkles around the drawing strings were permanent and draggy.

Aileen shook her head. Her crossing was turning into anything at all but the lonely thing she had foreshadowed. It was all the fault of Mrs. General. If only she had remained sitting at table with her friend of the untrammelled manners! Then she would not have been wondering what Stanway wanted to talk about, that noon. Still, there was Clode. And Grieg. And the Sedalian. And, anyway, she would have one good morning wholly to herself. Her fingers shut upon the second book in line, not the first one with the seven forgotten chapters. Then, after an instant's hesitation, she hung the workbag on her arm. Thus accoutred, she betook herself up to the boat deck.

By eleven o'clock and the advent of broth, Miss Aileen Warburton was fast coming to the conclusion that she was badly bored, very, very badly. As a matter of pure theory, it is a restful thing to be

afloat upon the broad Atlantic, with nothing to do but cultivate the flower-patch of one's brain. As a matter of pure theory, any woman of gentle birth and average education and thirty years' experience of life should find herself an adequate companion for a seven-day crossing. In point of fact, Miss Aileen Warburton was finding herself, her novel, and her needlework a horrid bore, especially after the past three or four days, when she had not been left to herself for a single hour. Moreover, with the swift crystallization of human groups on shipboard, Aileen found herself looking on her shipmates outside her little circle as one looks on aliens of another land and tongue. She did not even trouble herself to watch them, as they passed her chair. Her mind retained its self-sufficiency; but her whole heart cried out for Stanway with his platitudes, for motherly Mrs. General, for Clode, albeit Clode was domineering and, just now and then, a little truculent. It was a positive relief when the broth-laden deck steward approached her chair. At least, he had been officially tangent to her customary circle.

Five minutes later, she set her empty cup down on the deck with a sudden thump and clatter, wriggled out of her chair, and walked off down the deck. One or two other women, who had so far recovered as to struggle up on deck, gazed after her with exceeding envy. It must be good to feel up to walking so carelessly as that, on such a day, especially in such clothes, they told each other. But then, somebody had said that Miss Warburton had crossed before. Maybe, next time, they themselves would stand it better. What was she? An American? Her clothes

looked it. But how plain they were! Somebody said she had a maid on board. Oh, yes, the passenger list. Well, it must be good to be able to go across, whenever one cared, and not be seasick; better to have such gowns, and a maid to care for them. But where was the tall, dark man who generally walked with her? Was he her cousin, or only just —

“Her beau,” another voice said conclusively.

Aileen, passing, heard. Her colour came, and she went back and sat down in her deck chair with a bump. Walking was like all the rest of it, a bore; especially walking alone. It emphasized the fact that one was mark for gossip. And, if Stanway came on deck, at noon, and found her without Mrs. General, people would gossip all the more.

The thought vexed Aileen, made her resentful. Of course, it was none of their business what she did, so long as she behaved herself according to her own inherited notions of good manners. And yet, like all nice women, Aileen hated gossip, hated to feel herself its target. Besides, Stanway, a marked man in himself, was bound to be rendering her a bit conspicuous. Perhaps she best would go down to her own cabin, and so forestall the danger that might come with his appearing. Only it was so stuffy, down below. Even while she hesitated, she was sliding back into her deck chair.

Where Miss Aileen Warburton was concerned, the deck steward was all eyes. Other women might flap and wiggle to their heart's content. Until she was rolled into a cocoon, he was blind to their needs and their manœuvres. Now, stepping to Aileen's

chair, he straightened down her rug and began deftly folding it about her.

"Miss Warburton?"

The deck steward paused, her lifted heels in the hollow of his hand. Without turning his head to look, he was well aware that the voice belonged to no one of Miss Aileen Warburton's little circle. Tentatively he stayed his hand, waiting to see what answer she would make.

Aileen looked up. The snubbiest-nosed Sedalian stood before her, his plaid cap in his hand, and his nice, frank, untutored admiration for her in his honest eyes.

The eyes were irresistible. Wondering what on earth the man could be wanting of her, Aileen yet realized that she could no more have repulsed him than she could have pushed away a friendly dog.

"Yes," she said, and few of her home acquaintances would have recognized the voice as hers.

"Don't think I mean to be rude about it," the Sedalian said directly. "My name is Price, you know; and we have been watching you, all the morning. It's not often you are alone; we wondered if you wouldn't like to join us in a game of shuffle-board."

There was no hesitation in his accent, no self-consciousness. Neither was he brutally direct in telling her how he had realized her boredom and come to her rescue. Instead, his little speech had been full of all manner of small reservations, delicate, yet crude. Back of it all, too, was the respect in the man's accent, the admiration in his eyes. With

Aileen's muffled heels still balanced in his cupped hands, the deck steward held his breath. He knew Aileen; he expected to see Price, the Sedalian, obliterated before his very eyes. Instead, he quite forgot his manners and dropped his jaw in stupefaction.

"Thank you, Mr. Price. It would be very nice, unless I am too stupid," she was saying gravely. "You think you could teach me? Your brother and his daughter will make up the four? Never mind the bag, Steward. Just roll it up inside the rug." And, sliding out of her deck chair, Aileen smiled and nodded at the astounded steward, then walked off down the deck at the Sedalian's side.

"Really, it was very good of you to ask me," she said to the assembled group, as she took her driver. "I appear to be the only seaworthy person of my own party, and I was growing very lonesome. What do you do? Just poke the thing on one of those numbered places?"

From the Sedalian explanations, delivered in a trio, it appeared that one did poke the thing, and then leave it to Father Neptune's somewhat unreliable mercies whether it remained on one of the numbered places or no; or, indeed, whether it hit any of them at all. With the ship rolling intermittently, it was somewhat difficult to calculate upon the chances of knocking the paint from the side wall of the smoking-room, or of landing ingloriously in the scuppers underneath the life-boats. Twice, indeed, the latter fate befell Miss Warburton; and she had the consequent mortification of seeing Price, who was forty plus and stout withal, wallowing beneath a life-boat

in frantic efforts to recover her errant property. And Miss Warburton, looking on, felt that she would better hold her peace and take things as they came. It would be impossible to apologize, without becoming too specific.

Meanwhile, with a growing sense of shame, Aileen confessed to herself that she was enjoying herself exceedingly. From a distance, she had despised shuffleboard, as a game beneath her notice. In the same way, she had disdained the bluff and burly Sedalians, pronouncing them totally impossible. Now she was finding the game by no means the easy thing she had supposed; her lack of skill roused her ambition to conquer it at any cost. As to the Sedalians, she found their downright talk, their forcible phrases, strangely attractive, all the more so from their absolute unlikeness to the speech she heard above her own New England cups of tea.

Accordingly, in the rests between her play, she talked with Price, her partner, about the ship, and the captain, and whether he had noticed the colour of the gulfweed on the Saturday afternoon, and why his wife was not a better sailor. She agreed with him, quite contrary to her secret judgment, that it was much better for the absent Mrs. Price to be quiet and on her back in bed; and she accompanied her agreement with precisely the smile that she had given to Clode, two days before. It was not Aileen's fault that the simple sincerity of the man interested her, and that she showed it. The girl was as many-sided as a five-point star. It was not her fault, if one-half of her acquaintances believed her insincere, while the other half, the one measured in the re-

entrant angles of her sympathies, believed themselves to be the coruscating points.

Stanway, however, crawling deckwards, at high noon, with the shambling tread of one whose morning portion has consisted of alternating layers of ship biscuit and of Mother Sill, ceased to believe at all, and became utterly agnostic. There in the driving mist, between the life-boats on the one hand and the smoking-room wall upon the other, Miss Aileen Warburton was careering up and down the wet and slippery deck, a driver in her hand. Lined up beside Miss Aileen Warburton, moreover, were three of the Sedalians, each armed with a similar driver; and the three Sedalians, as nearly as Stanway's astonished mind could discover, were uttering encouraging plaudits at her play. From the open window of the smoking-room, a steward's head protruded, a human counterpart of a cow gazing placidly out from above her manger in the stall.

Stanway gazed and glowered. Then, finding that Aileen was blissfully unconscious of the disdainful astonishment written on his greeny-yellow countenance, finding, too, the rolling of the ship a bit unsettling to his manliness, he turned upon his heel with what dignity he could muster, and started back, downstairs.

At the foot of the first flight, he met Clode, apparently bound on the same errand as himself. Furthermore, to judge by the tint of Clode's complexion, Clode's courage was even better than his own. In Stanway's present condition, speech was risky. None the less, he tried it.

"Going up?" he queried.

"Yes. Thought I'd try it."

Neither man asked an apology of the other for his curtness. There is a wonderful free-masonry of understanding, under some conditions.

"There's a good breeze."

"Miss Warburton up there?"

"Yes."

"Busy?"

A malevolent gleam came into Stanway's eyes.

"She looked so."

"What was she doing?"

Stanway made a perceptible effort to prolong the conversation, just one moment more. In the end, he accomplished it.

"Playing shuffleboard with those damned Sedalia people."

Then, his endurance spent, he vanished. Later, when his power for coherent thought renewed itself, he rejoiced at the memory of Clode's disgruntled face.

Clode, however, cautiously continued on his way, and came out upon the boat deck to find that, instead of being welcomed and coddled, his appearing was totally ignored. Not only were the deck chairs, for the most part, filled with specimens of humanity as demoralized as was he himself; but his manifest absorption in Aileen and in Aileen alone had not caused the other women to look on him with appreciative eyes. Now, themselves not too impeccable, they yet gazed upon him critically, commented softly upon the tints of his complexion, and murmured that his nose was out of joint. Clode, though, disregarded them completely, stared with accusing eyes at Aileen's

unconscious back, stared with disgusted eyes at Aileen's brutally healthy companions, and then essayed to walk down the deck to look on at their game.

Ten feet from Aileen's still unconscious back, the deck steward hailed him affably.

"You're a bit late, sir; but I'll bring you out a cup of broth directly."

And, before Clode could recover from his wave of total loathing, Aileen remarked to her Sedalian,—

"There's nothing in the world so funny to me as a seasick man. Do you know, Mr. Price, I'd really like to try it once, to see if it really is anything but mere imagination. My turn? Good!"

But, like his predecessor, Stanway, Clode was vanishing. Unlike Stanway, his later reflections held scanty element of rejoicing.

None the less, luncheon time over and half the afternoon gone by, Clode pluckily made another effort. The rolling of the ship was almost over, for a smart shower was levelling the waves. It also had well-nigh cleared the decks, and Clode, his hopes high, was making for his chair, when a light laugh fell on his ears, a laugh he already had come to recognize and to claim as his own especial property. He glanced in at the open window of the lounge beside him.

"You say they must touch, either sidewise or cornerwise? How stupid! And which did you say counted more: a full hand, or a straight?"

Side by side at the table underneath the window, both of the impenetrable Englishmen were busy, teaching Aileen to play poker patience.

CHAPTER NINE

"You expect to be in Flanders, too, then?"

Clode clasped his hands behind his head.

"Really, Miss Warburton, I am afraid I must confess I have n't many plans. No," for he caught a look in the girl's grey eyes which betrayed her fear lest her companion thought her over-curious; "it's not that I am trying to be reticent. I sailed, without a plan of any sort."

"It's not a business trip, then? We thought —" The girl caught herself up suddenly.

Before he spoke, Clode paused long enough to register a wonder as to the make-up of the *we*. The pause lent emphasis to his next words.

"No business trip, Miss Warburton. For a wonder, I am off in search of pleasure."

"I hope you'll find it," she wished him cordially.

"I doubt if I do. After half a lifetime of the other thing, we forget just how and where to look for it." Then he roused himself, physically, as well as mentally. His accent brightened, while he sat up with a jerk. "Anyway, I am pledged to stay away for a good four months. At least, whatever the pleasure, it is bound to be interesting. I was twenty-two, the last time I came over. Since, I've been living in a groove that had cut deeper and deeper, till it needed moral dynamite to get me out."

He laughed shortly. "In any case, it can't fail to broaden my perspective."

"Better than that, I hope," Aileen said thoughtfully, for she had caught the bitterness beneath the laugh.

The momentary bitterness all gone, he turned to face her, clear-eyed and smiling.

"The harness has been heavy; but I hope it has n't left any spots too badly galled. Else, given the chance, one takes the pleasure in any way it comes." He hesitated for an instant. Then he added, "Like this voyage, for instance."

It was impossible to mistake his accent. Aileen flushed. Then she parried swiftly.

"Even yesterday?" she asked him.

Clode laughed like a schoolboy at the memory.

"It was ignominious," he confessed; "totally ignominious in all of its details, especially the last one."

Their eyes met, and laughed, and the sea laughed with them, as well it might. There was no denying that one of the little comedies of shipboard had been played out to a finish, the night before, a finish as original as it was unpoetic. For a sodden and uncertain hour of the rainy afternoon, Clode had sat, limp and neglected, in his deck chair. Then, warned by the clink of cups that undesirable forms of nutriment were approaching, he had beaten an orderly retreat and buried himself once more within his cabin.

From that safe harbour of refuge, he heard the mess call on the bugle, heard Aileen's light step come down the passage, the only self-respecting, self-

reliant step, it seemed to him, in all the passage. He heard Haydock's hail, heard Haydock's prolix and realistic bulletin concerning all the invalids, himself included. Then the door shut behind her. It opened again, though, to admit Marie, opened once more, to be followed by the sound of Aileen's retreating footsteps. Then there was a long, soundless interval, before the step once more came back along the passage.

Clode let it come and go. Watch in hand, he waited for a long twenty minutes before he went upstairs. He had braced himself to undergo the lounge; but, to his relieved surprise, he found Aileen curled up in her deck chair under the light, reading industriously. For just a minute, he halted in the doorway, watching her intently. While he watched, his lips shaped themselves to a contented whistling, faint and low, too low for the girl to catch any echo of the familiar theme. In honest ignorance of his scrutiny, she read on, turning a leaf now and then, now and then lifting her head to stare out across the purple sea. The night was warm; but the salt wind swept over her, ruffling her yellow hair and curling it into myriads of little rings and tendrils that gleamed like polished metal in the strong light which streamed upon them from above. It ruffled the rug, too, and the silky scarf about her shoulders, now and then revealing the firm fine line of her throat, the decisive modelling where the neck rounded to join the shapely shoulders. She was good to look at, Clode told himself contentedly; and he made no effort to find out why it should be a matter of content to him. Instead, fists in pockets, lips still

shaped to his favourite melody, he sauntered down the deck and paused before her.

"May I?" he asked, with a glance at the chair beside her.

She looked up with a smile.

"Why not?"

He shrugged his shoulders, with an expressive glance down at the tweeds he customarily wore by day.

"I have not on my wedding garment," he confessed.

With the nestling motion of a little child preparing for an extra good time, she tucked her book out of sight, and drew her rug closer around her shoulders.

"Oh, but out here on deck, it does n't matter. You'd better get a rug, though. It is chilly here; and, after the day you —" she hesitated; then her half-protecting interest broke up in mirth; "after such a day as Haydock has reported, it would be fatal for you to be cold."

Her merry acceptance of past ignoble facts restored his self-respect as no commiseration could have done. He laughed, nodded, and obediently went off to look up the deck steward and the rugs.

Just how the rest of the situation happened, Clode, afterwards, could never say. Aileen was in her sweetest, simplest mood. He himself was boyishly happy at being there beside her, listening to her talk, staring alternately at the bright shimmer of her hair and out across the dusky sea, whose gentle rocking seemed to him now the essence of a lullaby, not ominous of disaster as it had been at dawn. And

the salty breeze was heavy with sleepiness, also, as it came sweeping in from across the unending surface of the deep, to play among the curly tendrils of his companion's hair and to rest its caressing touch upon his eyelids, pressing them down — and down — and down —

A sudden sound, rough, inelegant, and apparently proceeding from himself, aroused him. He sat up straight and stared about him guiltily. The chair beside him was quite empty. Aileen was gone; gone were her rug and book.

It was past ten o'clock, when Aileen came along the passage leading to her room. Haydock was lying in wait for her, his manner befitting one who wore the royal liveries, in his hand an unenclosed visiting card.

"For you, Miss Warburton," he said majestically, as he handed her the card. Then, when she had taken it from him, he bent forward and whispered raucously, "I'd let him down easy, Miss Warburton. He's feeling very sore."

And it was all this that, twelve hours later, had set them both to laughing like a pair of irresponsible youngsters, out for holiday.

"Anyway, we've freed our minds and consciences," Aileen observed, after an interval. "It's the sort of thing one could n't well ignore; it's best to have it out and over. But really, Mr. Clode —"

"Yes?"

"You gave my egotism a horrid knock," she told him.

"What about the blow to my own self-respect?" he asked her. "All in all, Miss Warburton, I think

we can cry quits. Shall we let the dead past do its intended work?"

"Never!" Aileen's eyes matched the sea in sparkle. "Not many people have such a charmingly original experience in their repertoire of stories. We'll each of us keep it for our very best, and embroider it to suit ourselves. And yet," she shook her head, in grave meditation; "I doubt whether even embroidery can beautify it very much." Then she shifted back to her earlier subject. "But, about your plans: I did n't intend to show an undue curiosity regarding them. I only thought, if you were going through Flanders, as you spoke of doing, we might meet. We hope to spend October there."

"We?"

"My young niece. Did n't I tell you? She has been over, for a year. Her mother came home in May, and Molly stayed on with an English chaperon, and then to pay some visits. Later, she will join me, and we are to travel together for a few weeks, before we come home."

"In Flanders?"

"Perhaps. Probably. And yet, I am not too sure. I want to go a little off the beaten track; but Molly is younger. She may prefer the tourist trail, as I call the everlasting itinerary that begins and ends at Paris. However, it will make more difference to her than it does to me. As you say, I am practically planless."

"And I absolutely so," he assented quickly. "In a way, it's rather restful. In another sense, it increases the responsibility. When I think about the work of making plans, I feel like bolting off to the

nearest Cook's office and letting them do their worst."

Aileen, forgetful of the sea that sparkled and dimpled and swished about them, turned to stare at Clode. A new accent had come into his pleasant voice, a new expression into his steady eyes. Something, a physical something, seemed to stir in her throat, as she saw and heard.

"Mr. Clode," she said gently; "you needed the rest."

Sharply he roused himself.

"Yes," he said. "So they told me. That's no reason, though, that I should parade the fact."

"You did n't. Give me credit for an occasional bit of intuition," she told him. "You've been getting very tired. What is the use of plans, till you are rested? Why not take things as they come, and just drift along with them? It will do you any amount more good."

He gave her one dumb look of gratitude for her comprehension. Then he turned and stared out at the sea.

"I know you're right, Miss Warburton," he said at length. "It's only my New England conscience that is so hard to down. East winds and baked beans, after many generations, are bound to have a modifying influence on one's psychology. It is more than fifteen years since I was over; it may be fifteen years more before I can get away again. My conscience and my common sense alike assure me that, with only four months' leave of absence, I can't half see half of the interesting things I ought."

"No." Aileen wrinkled her brows thoughtfully.

"But won't your — your people give you longer holiday?"

He smiled. Then he checked the smile.

"I am afraid I'd best not ask for it," he said.

"Too bad; especially as you say it does n't come too often," she made thoughtful comment. "Still, one can do a good deal in four months. That is about as long as I shall be over."

"And you go directly to the Continent?"

"No; I've some visits first, visits in England. Afterwards, I'm not too sure. Really, like you, I am planless; as you say, it's rather restful."

He crossed his legs and clasped his hands behind his head.

"Yes," he assented contentedly. "Yes, it is." But, while he spoke, he recognized the fact that, at one spot, his perfect planlessness was broken; that October, willy-nilly, would find him upon Belgian soil. Even yet, however, he had no real inkling of the way his whole map of the future was dangling from that one slim peg of time and space.

"Good-morning, Miss Warburton."

Clode's contentment snapped, with his upward glance and his abrupt uncrossing of his legs. He liked Stanway well enough. That is, he had conscientiously downed his earlier dislike of him. Nevertheless, he was conscious of an uncharitable desire to know that Stanway was still held prostrate in his berth. Instead, it was a very smiling and perky Stanway who, cap in hand, had paused before them. An instant later, Clode suppressed a start of extreme surprise. Aileen, to all seeming, shared in his

uncharitable desires. Such, at least, was the meaning that Clode read into her accent of reply.

"Oh, Mr. Stanway, good-morning. We hardly expected to see you out so early. You are better?"

"Yes, I am feeling fit enough, this morning. My ankle," Stanway palpably had forgotten the excuse he had transmitted to Aileen by way of Haydock, "is not nearly so painful as I had expected. May I join you? Thanks." And he lowered his long person into the deck chair at Aileen's other hand.

Clode was human. Moreover, he had overheard Haydock's clarion tones of the day before. Therefore,—

"How are your eyes, Stanway?" he inquired politely.

"My eyes?" Stanway evidently ransacked the corners of his brain, found what he needed, rallied from his temporary panic. "They are much better. All they required was a little rest; they're not too strong, and I can't be always looking out for them." Then, dismissing the temptation to be banal and prod Clode with like searching queries, he turned back to Aileen. "It's a perfect morning; is n't it? Really, one hates to think the crossing is so nearly over."

Aileen's assent was the obvious one for her to make. Indeed, she was too busy, wondering how she could speed one man or other on his way, to give much thought to choice of words. And so,—

"Yes; but think of the good things coming after!"

Then she had a hint of relenting. The smugness went out of Stanway's voice and manner, as, pointing to the sheet of shimmering, slithering blue around them, he asked, in evident rebuke,—

"Better than this?"

She liked his unswerving loyalty to the sea. It was quite impersonal; it echoed certain of her own ingrained devotions. Indeed, the attitudes of the two men beside her interested her intensely, so unlike were they, each so very characteristic of the man himself. Stanway analyzed the sea, appreciated it, loved it. Clode lived its life and made no comment. On which of them, however, it set its seal most strongly, to Aileen's mind there was no question. Not that she cared to question, though, least of all now when every womanish nerve in her was tingling with fear of an impending skirmish. Without daring to move her wrist, she glanced obliquely down, to see if she could make out the dial of her watch. Then she drew a breath of sharp relief, as six bells sounded. Rescue was imminent.

It came, indeed, upon the instant, came heralded by a flash of polished buttons in the sun. A moment afterward, Grieg halted by her chair.

"Ready, Miss Warburton?" he asked her, smiling. "Out again, Clode? That is good. Why don't you come along with us?" His well-trained glance cut Stanway from the picture utterly.

Aileen held out her hand for his assistance, slipped nimbly to her feet, and shook down her ruffled plumage.

"You'll excuse me?" she said vaguely to mankind in general. "I promised Mr. Grieg, yesterday, you see."

Her voice spoke courteous impenitence, nothing warmer. In her relief at escaping the impending clash, she vouchsafed no regret for either one of

her companions. Grieg, however, showed himself more merciful.

"Miss Warburton has promised to let me show her the ship," he said, in his nice voice and with his winning, friendly little smile. "Won't you come, too, Clode? We were talking about it, only the other day, you know. And perhaps Mr. —"

His lengthening dash recalled Aileen to her manners. Stanway bowed, as became a stricken relict, while Grieg nodded in recognition of the introduction.

"Mr. Stanway, perhaps you may like to join us. It would be a pleasure to me, if you care about it. Shall we start, then? I am sorry to be rushing you away; but I can only get an hour or two off duty at a time." And then, without more ado, he led the way downstairs, talking amicably to Aileen who walked beside him. Ten steps in the rear and side by side, Clode and Stanway followed after, like a pair of sulky poodle puppies.

As Grieg had foretold to Aileen, the afternoon before, their tour of inspection was a long one, long and devious. It began with the third-class quarters and the Marconi room, and it came to a climax by way of the engine-room: down narrow iron stairways, tier on tier, stretching on and on to lower levels far beneath the water line, levels filled with the silent din of churning pistons and burring wheels and giant connecting-rods that thrashed the air with silent, ceaseless fury, which ever seemed to be reaching out for something it was their fate to miss, always to be dragged back again to begin anew the circle of their effort. Everywhere was motion, power

at its highest pressure; everywhere the overwhelming heat, the stifling reek of oil, the dashing to and fro of crocky, half-nude human figures, seemingly at random, until one watched them for a little while. Then only was it evident that even their gyrations fell, like the iron machinery about them, into well-ordered cycles.

And then, out from a din which turned Grieg's words of explanation into a formless blur of murmuring, they passed through a low iron doorway, and into the long, long tunnel where, beside the oilers' narrow footpath, the great steel shaft of the propeller span and span in a majestic silence which caused the human mind to waver in its belief in its sole right to claim omnipotence; span and span, cleaving the ocean fastnesses, yet leaving scarce a mark behind. Standing beside it, Grieg's explanations ceased. Instead, almost involuntarily, he doffed his cap, as to a master.

Once back in the engine-room again, Aileen drew a long breath, and looked up at Grieg with shining eyes. His own eyes darkened with comprehension; but neither of them cared to phrase their common mood with spoken words.

It was Stanway who spoke at last, and with a manifest sense of uttering the decent thing.

"I love," he said, a little bit pontifically, "the rhythm of motion."

Clode, beside him, stuck his fists into his pockets.

"Yes," he assented calmly. "It's nice to see things happen."

And, for a second time, Grieg's eyes rested on Aileen's; this time, in frank amusement.

CHAPTER TEN

"MORNING, Miss Warburton! Fine, cool morning; is n't it? Going to have time for another whiff at shuffleboard, this noon?"

Aileen glanced up. Price, the Sedalian, hands in pockets, head covered with a flagrant panama, was tramping up the deck towards her, and hailing her as he came. Honest kindness shone out of every line of his snub-nosed countenance; breezes fluttered in his soft silk tie and in the corners of his unbuttoned coat. And Aileen, who was no actual democrat, yet sent him a frank smile in return. It was impossible to snub the man. In the first place, he was too all-benevolent; in the second, Aileen suspected, no snub of normal proportions would have the power to penetrate his moral epidermis.

Accordingly, she smiled up at him, as he paused before her.

"When do you want to play?" she questioned, closing her book by way of proof that she was giving him her full attention.

Price showed that he realized the honour. He pushed his hat a bit farther from his eyebrows, then thrust his fists into his trouser pockets and rattled the loose bits of money concealed therein. Mrs. Price, foulards and all, filled the foreground of his enjoyment. Nevertheless, there was room for other causes of content in the remote perspective; and

Price found one such cause in his acquaintance with the golden-haired possessor of the smoking-room verdict: "the most stunning woman on board, and damned snobbish at that." Indeed, in all that crossing, Aileen's vision had been curiously defective along certain ill-regulated lines. Whatever human object took her fancy, she saw it clearly and without freak or favour, always the nearest first. Else, she was unaware of any human contacts whatsoever. And Price had interested her, both for the unfamiliarity of his type, and for his honest goodness, his wish to share his superabundant pleasure with any one who came within his reach. Besides, it went against Aileen's grain to be worsted, in such a futile game as shuffleboard, by an antagonist in a white linen hat and thread gloves.

"When are you going to play, Mr. Price?" she asked him, then.

"At eleven?"

"Broth?" she suggested, with a smile.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Not strong enough to wreck our play, Miss Warburton. We'll go about it, right afterwards, if you'll be ready. I'll tell the quartermaster to chalk it off for us." And, an instant later, his square-toed boots were stubbing down the deck.

Aileen, left to herself, smoothed down her gown, smoothed up her rug, lifted her book, then let it fall, and idly watched the greyish line where blue arch met blue level at the other side of the dancing, sparkling waste of waters. On such a day as this, it was good to be afloat. It had been a joyous crossing, careless, content, freed from all dragging

ties, and welcomed everywhere by cordial, friendly people. From the early-morning visit from her pretty little stewardess whose very cap-strings fluttered with pleasure in her daily "little present from Mr. Grieg," to the delicious few moments between wake and sleep at night, when the trivial happenings of a contented day marched in caravan before her drowsy eyes: from early morning until late at night, each hour had brought its own pleasure, complete and irresponsible. It had all been the simple give and take of shipboard courtesy, offering nothing permanent, committing her to nothing. They had been good comrades and congenial. In some way or other, they all had ministered, each to the other. At Liverpool, they would go their ways and forget the very existences of each other. This was the conventional privilege of shipboard, and — her brows roughened slightly — yes, and perhaps its pain. The grey eyes narrowed. Then Aileen looked up alertly.

"Remember your lesson, Miss Warburton? Ten for a full; twelve for a straight? If you say the word, we'll have another go, to-night."

Laughing, she nodded up at the tall Englishman before her, one of the tall, lean Englishmen who dons his evening clothes as a matter of course, who takes his daily exercise in any form that offers, and repeats his General Confession of a Sunday morning, whether he finds himself on the good ship *Beatic*, or in the remoter districts of Beloochistan. At first glance, Aileen had despised him, because he had played bull. Her own descent into shuffleboard, though, had made her more tolerant; and, in the end, they had spent one long afternoon together,

wrangling amicably over their scoring in deck tennis.

The Englishman's companion and quasi-double, reassured by the girl's laugh, halted with him. He wore his eyeglass as a chronic adornment, and slightly distanced the other in the skill with which he waxed the tips of his little brown moustache. However, as an antidote, he knew Boston well, and had sat through the *New World Symphony* with outspoken appreciation. Moreover, he apparently adored babies; and was continually making little forays into the lower quarters of the ship and lugging back rosy specimens for Aileen's inspection. Aileen liked them both, honest, well-bred, simple gentlemen that they were, men in whose society she never felt uneasy longings for the protective presence of Mrs. General.

Now, as they dropped down beside her, one in the next chair, one sitting on his comrade's chair-arm, she forgot her book completely, while they talked out of the weather into an impersonal interchange of plans, then into a placid discussion of the chance that they might meet in Warwickshire where Aileen was to pay some visits, once the hunting season opened in full force.

"Not that I can hunt, though," she confessed. "It's one of the things we shed, when we made Old England over into New."

"You can ride?"

"I never did fall off," she answered him demurely, and the honest Englishman who put the question failed to discover that the sudden mirth which came into her eyes had to do with her own evasion. Aileen

had spoken literally. She could not well have fallen off, who had never yet been on. Her riding lessons, like some other things of her experience, were wholly of the future. Of this, however, she saw no need to make confession to her companions. It would only have muddled the impressions they had stored away, in summing up the States. The healthy Briton, saddle-trained for generations, has scanty comprehension of a race which vastly prefers to motor.

At length, one Englishman arose.

"It's jolly good to sit here and talk to Miss Warburton," he admonished his companion; "but we'll be getting soft, unless we're up and doing. Come, then. And at eight, Miss Warburton? Anyway, as soon as we've done coffee."

"Best not be making too many plans for this evening, Miss Warburton," Grieg's pleasant voice said in her ears, as his two compatriots went tramping down the deck.

She turned to face him, her eyes lighting into a cordiality different from any she had shown the others, as they came and went. In it was honest liking, honest acceptance of Grieg as a friend one likes to have and, having, keep.

"Why not?"

"We expect to make Queenstown, to-night, soon after dinner; that is, if the ship makes good."

Her face fell. Land never had seemed half so little attractive to her as it was doing now. Gladly she would have prolonged the voyage indefinitely.

"Oh, don't hurry her," she urged him, much as if the ship had been a venerable Dobbin.

He laughed, showing his hard, white teeth, creasing his face into new lines, likable and betraying the inherent decencies that made up the framework of his nature.

"We don't do that, Miss Warburton. We are a lazy line; we like our comfort more than we do speed. The *Beatic* is as slow as she is steady. Still, miles do count up, if one does enough of them; and we have had uncommonly good weather."

She shook her head.

"That depends on what you call good," she modified him.

He laughed again.

"Come back with us, on our November trip, and I'll show you the kind of thing I like," he told her merrily.

She answered in the same tone, without a thought that her random promise would ever be fulfilled.

"Very well. It is a bargain. Only, if I come, you must promise to make it worth my while."

"You could stand it?"

"Three years ago, I met a January blizzard on the Banks," she told him proudly.

"Yes? And what then?"

She dropped her eyes and spoke demurely.

"I ate caviar and stuffed olives, the worst day."

"You'll do, Miss Warburton."

"And there were only three other people down at dinner, besides the captain and the purser," she added, still with the air of a child saying off a well-conned lesson. Then she spoke alertly. "I count on you to give me something better, Mr. Grieg. Else, I won't come."

He brought his heels together with a click, and saluted.

"Agreed, Miss Warburton. It's an engagement, and a bargain," he assured her, as he turned away.

It was a good fifteen minutes now, before Stanway, the next comer, joined her. During the interval, Aileen left her book lying on the floor beside her chair, and sat, her hands clasped lightly on her rug, her eyes upon the wavering, flickering surface of the sea. Indeed, she made no effort to disguise from any watchful eye that she was thinking intently, happily, about the trim little officer with whom she had been talking. She saw no reason that she should disguise her interest. By virtue of his position and his uniform, as well as of his personality, Grieg was a marked man, whenever he came out on the boat deck. Moreover, his daily visits were always given to either Clode or to herself. Naturally, she would feel interest in him.

The fact of the matter was, up to this time, Aileen had liked Grieg better than any one whom she had met since sailing, felt more reliance upon his protection than on that of anybody else, Mrs. General not excepted. She had an instinctive feeling that Grieg, whatever was the game, would play fair. Moreover, he never told half of the things he knew on any theme. He always left her with the comfortable surety that it would be safe to go back again to any subject that they had abandoned; and, going back, to count on finding countless new phases of any hackneyed theme. And as a man of action? She smiled to herself, as she gazed unseeingly across

the tumbling waters; and, standing in a doorway slightly behind her chair, himself unseen, another man saw the smile and interpreted it infallibly, envious, and yet not disagreeing.

When Stanway, just a moment afterward, pushed past him with a nod, and went out on deck, the man's brows darkened, his thoughtful humming broke itself sharply in two. Turning upon his heel, he crossed to the starboard deck, went forward to the bow, and fell to pacing to and fro, his ashy-grey head bowed slightly, his eyes upon the planks beneath his feet.

Once he came back to his old place, and his frown deepened, as he turned away again. Five bells struck. Then six began.

Before the sixth stroke fell, Clode lifted up his head, squared his shoulders, and shut his jaw with a snap. An instant later, he was striding down the port deck from the bow to Aileen's chair. He reached her chair just as the deck steward, his tray in his hands, was bearing down upon her from the one direction, the Sedalian from the other. Stanway, stretched out in the chair beside her, a dozen paper pages in his hand, stared up remonstrantly at this triple invasion of their double solitude.

The relict was looking uncommonly full of cheer, that morning. Day by day, since they had left the Ambrose Channel, he had been parting with somewhat of his melancholy. The substitution of grey suede gloves for his shiny black ones, and the vanishing of his sable studs at dinner; these changes were symbolic of a total alteration in the man. It was only now in his most unguarded moments that

the hallmark *Inconsolable* came out with any real degree of plainness. At other and less intermittent instants, it was obvious that consolation already had begun its healing work. Now, though, healing was intensified still more by the rising wave of his exasperation.

"Good-morning, Clode," he remarked curtly, and his accent added, "And get on, out of our way."

Their eyes met; the meeting told Stanway that he had encountered his master.

"Good-morning, Stanway. Fine morning; is n't it? Sorry to interrupt you; but Miss Warburton was coming to the top deck. Can I help you up, Miss Warburton?" And Clode's hand came out, with swift assurance.

Too astounded to rebel, Aileen sat up and faced him. Then, for some reason which, afterwards, she tried in vain to fathom, she took his hand and slid out of her chair.

"But —" she said vaguely. "I —"

Clode bore down any objections she was striving to make.

"You'll not need your rugs, I think. I sent mine up there, on the chance of its being cool. Steward, I'll take a couple of cups of broth. Now, Miss Warburton." And, literally driving her before him much as a collie drives reluctant sheep, he had her settled in a corner of the top deck, before she could gather up her wits sufficiently to oppose him.

Once settled on Clode's rug, her back to a convenient bit of railing and her cup poised insecurely on her knee, though, Aileen found her tongue.

"Really, Mr. Clode, does it occur to you that you

have been a trifle masterful?" she asked him, and her accent was more than a trifle chilly.

"I meant to be," Clode made tranquil answer.

"And that you weren't too polite to poor Mr. Stanway?"

Clode slightly changed his phrase.

"I did n't mean to be," he said, with unabated tranquillity, after an instant devoted to silent digestion of her choice of adjective for Stanway.

"Oh!" Aileen observed and, all things considered, it was the most prudent observation that she could have made. Realizing that a crisis of some sort was impending, she also realized that her monosyllable committed her to nothing.

There came a silence. Clode sipped his broth. Aileen, her broth untasted, sat with her eyes upon the blue-grey sea which seemed to be stretching out before her to the universe's end, seemed, by its very infinity, to increase her sense of breathless waiting for — she knew not what.

At last Clode spoke, quietly, but with a quietness akin to Fate itself.

"Miss Warburton, I brought you up here for one especial purpose."

She whitened to the lips, and lifted her grey eyes to his in mute appeal. Freedom was sweet to her, the sort of freedom which allowed her to be friends with all men, which allowed her, too, to think herself the eternal complement of none.

"Well?" she asked hoarsely, after an interval of silence which Clode betrayed no signs of breaking.

Quite quietly he set down his empty cup. Quite

quietly he clasped his hands upon his knee. Quite quietly he spoke.

"Miss Warburton, I wish to ask you to become my wife," he said.

"Oh, no!" Her immobility all ended, she drew back from him and started to rise.

Instantly Clode arose and stood looking down on her with steadfast eyes that held her just as surely in her place as if his two strong hands had shut themselves upon her shoulders.

"Wait," he bade her sternly. "Hear me out. It is not that I expect you to give me your consent, to-day. God knows," his voice deepened, thrilled; "I wish you might." His accent quickened. "Is that impossible, Aileen?"

She nodded. Her stiff lips could hardly form the single word with which she echoed him.

"Impossible!"

He had to bend his head to hear. His face lost a little of its calm look of mastery; but his clear eyes never wavered.

"But why?"

"I never thought—I never wished to—Oh, I really can't!" she said. Then, heedless of the officers pacing, pacing the long white bridge, she bowed her burning cheeks, her hot eyes, in her hands.

Clode let her have a moment or two to rally. Then, contrary to his wont, he began to plead.

"But I think that I could make you happy, Aileen. And I know that I could give you—" he hesitated. Then he added simply, "a loyalty and a love in which no other woman has ever shared." Again his voice quickened, grew vibrant. "It's no credit to

me, Aileen, that I am offering you the first, the only, real love I have known. I have never cared to marry, never have meant to do it. I had thought," his tone grew scornful, "that a man's life was too full of other, better things; that women merely blunted a man's ambition, upset the working out of all his plans. In other words, I was too ambitious to share with any other human being my chances of success. These past days have taught me what a self-centred idiot I have been. Yes, I know they have been very few; but life on shipboard is n't like any other life. Ordinary rules are suspended; one lives half a lifetime in a single hour. And I have learned my lesson, learned it well. Not that I dared to hope that I had taught it to you, too. There's not been time enough for that."

The girl took down her hands and faced him with what shreds of pride were left to her.

"No, Mr. Clode. And there never will be time enough."

Imperiously he checked her.

"My speech holds no such word as *never*," he told her quietly. "I am willing to wait, if I must."

"It will do no good," she said, with a sharpness born, not of any real antagonism to the man before her, but merely out of her throbbing nerves.

"It shall," he said quietly. "I say that with perfect trust, even if I am no Galahad."

Startled, she looked up at him, and her eyes betrayed fear.

"You mean?" she asked; and now the earlier constriction of her throat was rendered all the more stifling by the sudden pounding of her heart. For

the moment, though, her mental struggle was half nullified by the physical pain that shot her through and through. Her whole New England ancestry, meanwhile, was rising up in condemnation of her, that any question of her so-called heart could leave her brain a blank, and reduce her merely to a throbbing thing of blood and flesh and nerves.

Again Clode gave her time to rally, before he spoke.

"I mean," he said at last; "that I am not likely to come any nearer your ideal than Bernie Lennox."

This time, her hauteur was in no way assumed. She rose to her feet and faced him with a steady dignity.

"You knew it, all the time," she said, in bitter scorn. "And yet, you —"

His eyes met hers unwaveringly.

"I never knew it, till you told me."

"I! Told you!"

"Not in so many words, of course."

"I should say not," she retorted angrily.

His answer never lost its level calm.

"No; not in words," he iterated.

"How then?"

"In countless little ways. I am not sure which of them first told me the whole truth. Looking back, of course, I can see it in all of our talk. Most of all, perhaps, it was in the way you defended the girl's point of view."

"I was honest, anyway," she said shortly. "I still feel I was justified."

Then she listened in surprise to his slow answer.

"So do I, now. It was a new idea to me, though."

It changed all my perspective, changed all my preconceived ideas of a woman's point of view. Perhaps, more than any other one thing, it brought me to my present position."

"And that?" she questioned rashly.

And then her repentance came too late, for, —

"Waiting at your feet," he told her humbly, and the new humility, sitting well upon him, brought back her sense of stifling, of constriction of her throat and lungs.

For one moment, the tears hung in her grey eyes. Then she lifted her head high in the air, to prevent their dropping.

"Thank you, Mr. Clode," she said slowly. "You are offering me the highest honour in your gift. I do appreciate it. I appreciate you, too, I think. I honour you; and I like you; and I have enjoyed your being on the ship. Still, I shall never marry you."

"Why?" Calm as doom, the crisp word cut across the nervous deliberation of her speech.

Her own speech crisped in its turn.

"Two reasons. I do not love you —"

"Yet," he subjoined quietly.

A gleam of anger burned in her eyes.

"You are not too modest, Mr. Clode."

If she expected him to shrivel at her accent, she was disappointed.

"I know the strength of my own will," he corrected her unflinchingly. "A will like mine, coupled with an honest, upright purpose, can mould a man to anything he chooses, even to making himself worthy of your love."

She caught her lower lip between her teeth. Then she finished out her earlier speech.

"And, besides, I have no wish to marry. You may not understand it, may think that I am unwomanly, talking for mere effect. But think a minute, Mr. Clode. What would I gain? And how much I would lose! I am past thirty, reaching an age where I can enjoy practical independence without arousing disapproval. I have ever so many vital interests, and no real ties. I can come and go, can make my own plans and enjoy my own life as it passes. Why should I tie myself down for all time to come, bind myself by conditions that, however charming at the start, would end by galling me by their very permanence? We single women are not accidents of nature, Mr. Clode. We have our place, our purpose, our reason for existence. And it is for us to choose. For me, I have no wish to marry."

Once more, his answer came to her unflinchingly.

"Not yet. The time will come, for I shall make it. How? I trust I still am plastic; I have a will, and the highest, the most earnest purpose God can give to any man. I shall make it my one aim, so far as lies in honour, to fashion myself into the husband you would choose."

"But I have told you I shall not choose one," she broke in impatiently. Then she fell silent, because her voice, catching on her wilful words, rendered them unsteady.

"Perhaps," he assented calmly. "Still, if I do my own honest part, I can count on time — and life

—to come to my help in the end. No, wait! I have not finished yet, Aileen, and you must hear me out. This ends my beggary of love from you. You have nothing to give me now. Then I shall wait, doing my own part, and hoping always, always longing for the day when you will come to me and tell me you are ready.”

“I! Come to you!”

“Yes, just that. Always I shall be waiting. I can’t tell when you will be ready to take what I can offer; I have no right to burden you by following you up and making you listen over and over again to the thing you know perfectly well already. Till you come, I shall hold myself to my best, the best that only the hope of you can make me. When you come, I shall give you myself, and all I have. But, when you come, you must come to me as your whole self. Here on this ship, you have ruled us all like a many-sided queen, a subject for each side. We have been glad and proud,” and Aileen’s pulse quickened, as she watched his smile, “to do your royal bidding. That has been good; but it’s not at all the thing I mean to have, in the long run. Some day, some time,” as he took off his cap, the sun struck down on his ashy-grey hair, on his keen and steady eyes and on his thin, firm lips, struck down and disclosed the inherent man in his full nobility of character and of aim; “some day, Aileen, I mean to be, not your cringing subject, depending on your smile, but your loving, loyal, royal mate. When that day comes, I count on you to say the word. Till then, it will be your fault if we do not keep on, as we are now, good friends and comrades.”

There came an instant of hesitation. Then Aileen, albeit reluctantly, laid her hand in his. Afterwards, turning on his heel, he left her. She watched his retreating shoulders, his erect and shapely head, through a thickening mist of tears.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

GRIEG was right, and wrong.

The *Beatic* did make Queenstown, that night; but not until the night was far spent. In other words, the tender came alongside at two o'clock in the morning. It found the ship's company, for the most part, astir and agog for news. The impassive lack of interest in landward things, so characteristic of ship life, had crumbled suddenly at dinner time. Queenstown had Marconi-ed messages galore to the *Beatic*; the powers on the bridge, realizing the nearness now to newspapers, had seen no reason for keeping up their earlier censorship.

Accordingly, the passengers, going down to dinner, had discovered a bulletin board thickly covered with sensations of the first magnitude. The strike, which had threatened England at the time of their sailing, had grown to be an affair of magnificent proportions. London was an armed camp; Saint Paul's dome was the signal centre of the seat of war; while, as for Liverpool, the conditions were anarchical. The passengers discussed the matter throughout dinner; it quite ousted ship gossip and the prudent interchange of plans. On the way up from dinner, a round dozen men lined up before the purser's window. Among the dozen was Stanway.

Later, his evening clothes exchanged for black-barred tweeds and his hasty packing done, he went

up to the lounge to explain his change of plan. It really had not mattered to him where he landed. He had meant to come back to Ireland later, anyway. And, with the vagueness of his plans, coupled with the uncertainties of railway travel, it seemed a bit foolish to go to Liverpool and be stranded there, unable to get on to London. Traffic was at a standstill, and strike conditions were a bore. If only there were chance of excitement, then of course —

Clode, quite in his normal mood, listened, helping Stanway on with an occasional question, a still more occasional assent. Aileen, looking rather pale and wan, sat curled up in the lee of Mrs. General, and accorded him only a silent attention. Her eyes were dull, and her whole manner listless now, although she had been feverishly bright at dinner. Stanway, watching her obliquely, ransacked his mind for guiding landmarks out of his past experience. Could it be that the unexpected suddenness of his departure was telling upon her composure? His eyes lighted; then he pulled down the corners of his lips. The time had been too short for that, too short for them both, and for two very different reasons. That was no sign, though, that the fulness of time would not come, some day.

With such a number of people going ashore, with such a chance of exciting tidings to come on board, it was no especial wonder that everybody was up and doing, when the tender came alongside at Queens-town. Earlier, there had been sandwiches and coffee in the dining-room, nominally to feed the bodies of the departing score of passengers, actually to occupy the nervous fingers of the other scores who were to

remain on board. Afterwards, everybody stood about on tenterhooks of waiting, stood about for two long hours until, without warning, the coming of the tender sorted them swiftly into two groups, the ones who went ashore to peaceful Ireland, and the ones who stayed on board and read the papers, only to find that temporary chaos reigned on English soil.

Clode waved a cordial hand at the retreating back of Stanway, bought up copies of all the papers within reach, then hurried back in search of Aileen, just starting wearily up the stairs.

"Good-night, Miss Warburton," he bade her, and his voice had the old kindly ring, no more, no less. "A good night's rest to you! You look as if you needed it. I'll see you in the morning."

Smiling, he went his way; and, while he went, he hummed softly to himself the little phrase he loved so well, the phrase to all seeming so unlike the man, and yet so curiously characteristic of his real nature.

"With grateful hearts, mm hm mm hm,
Mm hm mm fav'ring gale."

Humming, his eyes were very steadfast, and his brow unclouded.

Clode was early at breakfast, the next morning. He had neglected to explain to Aileen, the night before, that Mrs. General had invited him to take Stanway's vacant place at their table. Neither did he, as he rose to spin Aileen's chair to position, explain by what clever necromancy he had extracted the invitation. He merely settled her in her place, bade her good-morning, and talked about the news

from Liverpool, now thickening fast with every fresh layer of bulletins pinned upon the board.

Aileen still looked wan and heavy-eyed; and Clode's keen glance had not lost the little start of consternation which had followed her discovery that he was seated at their table. She had made a brave rallying, however; and, by the end of breakfast, Clode's will, meeting her own well-trained tact, had practically downed her earlier embarrassment. It was quite in their old spirit of comradeship that they went up the stairs together.

At the top of the stairs, Clode stood aside to let her pass on without him. He had the superlative common sense not to tax her endurance too far. For the present, it was enough that they had spent an hour together on an outward semblance of their former terms. Later in the morning, he would go back to her again. For the hour, it was as well for her to be left alone. Stanway gone, and Grieg busy with preparations for their landing, there were no really complicating human factors within reach.

Left to herself, then, Aileen gave a little sigh of relief, as she sank down in her chair on deck. The deck was practically deserted; by no means all the passengers owned an efficient Marie to carry out instructions regarding the readiness of luggage for removal. Mrs. General was busy packing, and the Sedalians, and the self-respecting pair of Britons. Indeed, barely a dozen people dotted the deck; with none of them Aileen had so much as a nodding acquaintance. She could not have been more alone, had she been stranded in Sahara.

And loneliness was the one thing she needed above

all else, loneliness and time. She had maintained her own position pluckily, the day before; but the question had come and gone so suddenly that even now she had not fully analyzed her reasons for her own decision. She needed time to set them out in logical order, to be reviewed again and again at her leisure. She approved her own decision. She had not spoken at random, when she had assured Clode that, marrying, she would lose the one thing so many women covet most: freedom, the right to live their lives as seems good to them, the power to be fast friends with many, the permanent complement of none. Neither had she spoken at random, when she had tried to make Clode realize that the single woman has her own place in the world: not the neglected spinster longing to be plucked from her ancestral stock; but the independent and popular woman who remains single by no freak of fortune, but by her own volition.

For years, she had been slowly developing this creed of hers. It had had its beginnings soon after the episode of Bernie Lennox, an episode which had taught her that the average young girl must either modify her ideals almost past recognition, or else, for their sake, give up most other things that women are supposed to seek. She had made her choice deliberately, even with unseemly vacillation. In the end of all things, she had clung to her ideals, and had thrown Bernie over. Since then, liking men and enjoying their society, being liked in turn, she had gone upon the simple theory that safety lies in numbers. She had bestowed her smiles with such an absolute impartiality that, up to now, no one

recipient had dared to think of himself as favoured above all the others.

And now? She pressed her fingers against her burning eyes and shuddered slightly. With an inexpressible self-loathing, she confessed to herself the physical quickening of her pulses, the tightening of her throat, as Clode's face came once more before her: Clode's thin, firm lips, Clode's quiet little smile, Clode's ash-grey head which, by good rights, should have lost its appealing quality at the same epoch that it had lost its pristine brown. She bit her lip impatiently. She would never, never settle down and marry and get humdrum. And, in any case, she never would marry such a man as Clode, a man as unheroic in his outward aspect as he was masterful of spirit. And yet bitterly as, for the instant, she resented his whole personality, Aileen was honest enough to admit that, past all gainsaying, not one of the men on shipboard, from the Sedalians to the poetic relict, Stanway, matched the inherent power and charm and — yes, the versatility of Clode, the sturdy, steady little man whom, even now, she was finding so totally unclassifiable.

“You look deserted, Miss Warburton.”

She recognized the voice as that of Grieg, and her fingers came down from before her eyes. Grieg noticed the glitter in the eyes, and wondered.

“It is only that I am badly spoiled. I have my wonderful Marie to do my packing, so I can enjoy myself up to the final minute.”

“You have enjoyed the crossing?”

Even Aileen was surprised by the fervour of her own half-involuntary words, as she made answer, —

"I've never known one half so good."

"You forgive us our fine weather, then?"

She had pulled herself up, though; and now her voice had its customarily guarded ring.

"You're not to construe my enthusiasm into permission to fail me on my return passage, Mr. Grieg. You've promised to show me some real weather then. This has been perfect in its own way, though; and I have enjoyed the half-empty ship so much. Always till now, I've crossed in the high tide of the season."

"I know. And it's not as pleasant. Besides, we have had some interesting people on board, this trip. Apropos, don't you find Mr. Clode rather remarkable?"

Aileen reddened slightly at the unlooked-for question.

"I like him," she admitted guardedly. "He has been nice to me, too, all the way over."

Grieg nodded.

"He has told me about enjoying you," he said. "We've had a few grand talks together, nights. I think he is one of the most unusual men I have ever met."

Aileen smiled in courteous assent. Then she yielded to her curiosity.

"How do you mean?"

"So simple. So direct. So totally unconscious. Considering who and what he is, it really is astounding."

"What is he?"

Grieg opened his eyes. He had not needed Bernie's telegram to tell him who was their sturdy little passenger with the ash-grey head.

"It would be easier to tell you who he is n't, Miss Warburton. Did n't you know that he was Carl P. J. Clode?"

Aileen gasped. The name was one that counted much, even in the bubbling ferment of American business life. Before she could rally and reply, Grieg had saluted.


"The captain has sent for me, Miss Warburton. I shall see you again. We're not due in Liverpool till nearly five." And he left her to her thoughts.

The thoughts were swift ones, swift and contradictory. In one instant, she told herself haughtily that her new discovery made not one whit of difference; that she would not marry anybody, from Haydock to King George the Fifth of England. The next instant, she was reminding herself that, whatever her later attitude to Clode, the fact that he was Carl P. J. Clode would put it at once and for ever out of her power to recur to the subject of the day before. And then her poise came back to her. Clode was Clode, her friendly comrade, and not a walking item from *Who's Who*. As such, he must be judged. Besides, he was by no means the first known name that she had been accustomed to use familiarly. There was no more reason that he should upset the years-old tenets of her personal creed than any of the others. It was late in the day for her to turn into a snob. And, with one strong effort, Aileen Warburton cast from her the details of Clode's past history as entering factors in the case. She forced herself to take up her former reverie at just the point where Grieg had broken in upon it.

Yes, marrying, she would have much to lose. The

sum total of her loss could be given in a phrase: the abandonment of her rights to egotism. Aileen Warburton, unlike Clode, had made no effort to blind herself to the fact of her own egotism. She realized it fully, gloried in it, too. Not that she called it by so harsh a name. Rather, she regarded it as a pretty, deprecating confidence in the friendliness of others. The name was insignificant; it was the fact she counted, valued, wished to retain at almost any cost. It was the fact which had given her, and she faced the situation squarely, without unseemly exhilaration or undue modesty — had given into her hands the social supremacy of the ship. She had made no effort for it; she had simply followed her customary habit of negligent waiting upon the course of events; she had never once, so far as she could judge, ~~herself~~, overstepped the limits of the strictest code of ~~spinster~~ manners. And yet, not one of the eager ~~damsels~~ on board ship had had a tenth of the good time which had been given her, not one of them had been recognized as in any sense her associate and her coadjutor. Ostensibly chaperoned by Mrs. General, Aileen, in so far as she had deigned to do, had been the ruling spirit of the ship. Other and lesser women had measured their manners by her own, had understudied her with a zeal which deserved a reward by far more ample than any which it had won.

Thirty-two years, pretty, prosperous, independent, accountable to none save to her family traditions! No change could come to her, without its involving some sort of loss. Aileen drew a long breath at the thought; it was as if even the suggestion stifled



her. It was so good to have reached the point where she could combine the alertness of her youth with certain immunities born of the opening middle years. Bound at all points, she yet was able to go free, as free, that is, as a well-bred woman cares to go. And that very form of freedom would be the first thing to be taken from her, on her wedding morning.

And the gain? Exerting all her will, she succeeded in shutting out Clode's picture from her mind, succeeded in facing the question quite impersonally. However she might feel to-day, the time was bound to be when the irk would come, not by way of Clode as an individual, but by way of the fact that she had given her life into the hands of any husband. For irk there would be; of that she had scant doubt. Aileen, at thirty-two, was curiously loyal to her ideal which she had created in her budding womanhood. No man had consistently come up to it for many days at a time; at least, no man, until—Resolutely she took a fresh grip upon her decision to consider the question quite impersonally. Besides the coming up to one's ideal, the keeping to the level, did not by any means imply the tallying with it at all points. And, in the time to come, no one could tell just which of the missed points would prove to be the very one essential to her happiness.

Moreover, lacking any other element, the very permanence of the bond would be irksome; the very fact that it was a bond would fret her. What if, for nine days out of every ten, she were to revel in the sense of companionship, of comprehension, of full union? The tenth day would be bound to come, and, with it, a reaction. She would long to

pick up her husband, neck and heels, and set him down outside her spiritual doors, and then, if he were too persistent in his knocking, lock the doors upon him. The fact that he had the right to knock and demand admission: that would madden her past all reasonableness. And he would have the right, if she did marry him. She would owe it to him, if her vows meant anything at all, to deny herself the luxury of secrets, of reservations; in fact, of individuality.

Of course, it would be good to have somebody always in reach to share one's viewpoint, to halve one's interests, to fight one's battles. But would he, any *he*, do all of that, and always? And did not her present group of assorted *hes* do all of these things to perfection? Then what gain? What does any woman gain by marriage, save and except a home?

"Wars and rumours of wars, Miss Warburton," Clode's voice was saying in her ears.

She looked up alertly, hating and despising herself, the while, for the ignoble surety that, at his quiet, even voice, something leaped up within her and fell to throbbing violently. Disgusting to know one's cardiac muscles were answering to a purely mental contact! Undignified to feel the hot blood rushing to her cheeks, at the approach of an acquaintance of scarcely a week's standing! And then, as her eyes rested on the ashy-grey head, the thin, firm lips, the friendly, smiling eyes, the colour dropped from her face again, leaving it white and wan. At that moment, she had a sudden realization of all that Clode might have been to her, had she only met him just

a few years earlier, before she had so fully realized the value of her present independence, a sudden surety that no longer could she argue out the question quite impersonally. For her, from that time forward, impersonality was dead. None the less, Aileen Warburton, admitting the fact, yet vowed within herself that she would die a thousand deaths, rather than lower her flag.

At that instant, both their fates were trembling in the balance. Had Clode just then met her with any sign of tenderness, with any argument, Aileen would have struck her colours and tossed them at his feet. For that instant, the girl's naked soul was standing at the windows of her eyes, gazing longingly, lovingly, at Clode. Then, as it saw no answering signal from his smiling eyes, it quietly drew down the blinds, while the instant passed on into the rising total of eternity.

"How do you mean, Mr. Clode?" Aileen forced herself to say, with an easy unconcern which matched his own.

"Liverpool news. The latest bulletin has it that the station is burning; that the city is in the hands of a mob. I have been trying to verify the stories; but it's not much use. Meanwhile, had you noticed that we are slowing down?"

Aileen looked up. Sure enough, the green hills of Ireland were no longer sliding backward past her chair. Instead, they were motionless, motionless the water underneath the *Beatic's* keel.

"But why?"

Clode shrugged his shoulders.

"Nobody can tell. At least, nobody will. It's

my opinion we are waiting here for orders. You know we have some official wives on board; they may not care to risk them in Liverpool, until the place calms down. Apropos — ” Then Clode halted, flushing at his unlucky sequence of ideas.

“ Well? ”

He laughed uneasily.

“ I hope you ’ll not think it a liberty, Miss Warburton; but I had no time to ask anybody’s permission. The whole state of things ahead of us is so uncertain that I have sent off a wireless to reserve a carriage in my name, to take you and the Generals up to London. Of course, I ’ve kept a place near us for your maid. You don’t mind? ”

“ Mind? Why should I? ” And Aileen held out her hand. “ Mr. Clode, you think of everything, and I ’m more grateful to you than you know. My plans had n’t included strikes, and the crossing England in the dead of night. And now we shall keep up our good times to the very end.”

Frankly as a boy, she smiled at him, frankly she held out her hand. And Clode, for all his vaunted comprehension of her nature, had not the slightest notion of the self-mastery which entered into the making of that frankness.

Just once and for one instant, though, he thought he gained an inkling.

It was when he, with Aileen beside him, stood leaning in the window of the corridor of the train which was bearing them across the northern edge of Wales. Through the open carriage door behind them, they could see Mrs. General resting drowsily in one window corner, could hear the lilting snores

of the poor General who, in the opposite window corner, was sleeping off the countless fatigues of an exciting day.

Indeed, the General had a right to be weary, for the day had been exhausting, exhausting from the very sense of uncertainty which had hung about the movements of the ship. Officers clustered on the bridge; stewards clustered in the dining-room and in the cabin corridors; stewardesses whispered in corners. All alike, though, had been exasperatingly reticent concerning the plans of the *Beatic* which still lay motionless upon the shining, moving sea. Then, when everybody's nerves were threadbare, the *Beatic* had stirred once more, and gone sliding through the sunny waters, not now towards chaotic Liverpool, but straight in to peaceful Holyhead.

Side by side on the starboard boat deck, Clode and Aileen watched the Welsh hills broaden on their view, watched the tender bearing down upon them. Grieg joined them, just as she came alongside.

"It's hard to say good-bye," he said simply; "but it's the thing we sailors have to face, Miss Warburton. Besides, you're coming back with us, this autumn."

Smiling straight into his dark eyes, she offered him her hand.

"It's a promise, and a bargain, Mr. Grieg. See that you keep your end of it," she warned him.

And then, before she really grasped what was happening, she found herself, with Clode beside her, standing on the tender's deck, staring up at the huge black hull that loomed above her, gazing up

to its white topmost deck where Grieg, smiling down at her, was standing at salute.

Now, the *Beatic* and Grieg almost forgotten, incidents of an incident that was past, Clode and Aileen were standing in the window of the corridor, looking out upon a moving picture beyond the power of man to paint. Behind them, cove succeeding cove and rocky point succeeding rocky point, there opened out the sea, blue and calm, its beaches baby-bordered, a sea on which the *Beatic* now was riding proudly northward. Before them rose the mountains of North Wales, bold, craggy peaks and softly-rounded domes; and domes and crags and peaks were painted to a rosy violet in the setting sun. And then the rose died out, and the sea went gold, then grey, and the hills turned to a cold, dark purple, as the stars came pricking through the blue arch overhead.

It was then that Clode, heedless of any one who saw him, covered Aileen's fingers, resting on the window, with his own. Covering them, he bent to her and called her by her name.

"I am breaking my word, I know," he told her gently; "but the good-byes are harder than I thought. Aileen, do you still feel that I must wait?"

Then he bent nearer for her answer. Else, it would have escaped even his eager ears.

"Don't — wait," she bade him.

All the light of mid-day, or of manhood, flowed into his face.

"You mean — " he was beginning breathlessly.

With a dreary little gesture, she silenced him.

"I mean," she told him gravely; "that it will be no use."

Her voice was steady, under perfect self-control. None the less, Clode, gazing at her intently, could see the teardrops hanging on her yellow lashes. A weaker man than he would have gathered her, there and then, into his arms.

Clode, being Clode, preferred to wait.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE strike was ended. The dome of Saint Paul's had ceased to be a signal tower; the Green Park was no longer an armed camp. Rumours of war had flooded Britain and invaded France; then they had gone the way of other rumours, recorded in the blue books of the nation, but leaving no permanent smut on history's page. The Louvre had closed suddenly, of a summer morning; had opened again, lacking the Mona Lisa. August, in short, was over; and northern Europe, for all its recent frenzy, was settling back into its wonted calm.

It was September now. The lions of Trafalgar Square were drowsing in the midday sun. Between them and against an azure sky, barred, Jack-wise, with floating bits of cloud, Lord Nelson, on his slender column, stood gazing superciliously down on the maelstrom of traffic that surged and circled at his feet. And, out of the maelstrom, with no little difficulty, 'Bus Twenty-four detached itself and drew up at the curb. An instant afterwards, out of the 'bus stepped Molly.

Immediately one saw her, one quite realized why people called her Molly, without the slightest reference to her later names. The *Molly* fitted her like a glove; it summed her up and described her precisely. Other details, if any were needed, concerned themselves with the colour of her hair, a brighter

gold than Aileen's, with the round slimness of her figure, with her long-lashed blue eyes. But her trick of slowly lifting those long lashes and bringing the blue eyes into play: that was included in the *Molly* of her.

Like Aileen, she was dressed with extreme simplicity. But whereas Aileen's simplicity rendered her a bit conspicuous, Molly's was veritably strident. Her walk, though, belied the aggressive smartness of her costume; it was girlish, modest. All in all, Molly was a clean-minded, healthy little product of the times, a girl who never sought attention, yet could no more have avoided it than she could have eaten with her knife, or halted with her hands upon her hips.

Now, heedless of the glances following her, she rounded the Whitehall corner, turned down again into Northumberland Avenue, and went inside the quietest of the three great hotels which line that quiet street. Despite the fact that it was her first appearing in the doorway, a row of uniformed lackeys bowed themselves into respectful right angles, then hastened forward to await her bidding. With calm deliberation, Molly peered out from beneath her wide black hat, made careful choice between a man of many medals and a spectacular giant with a fierce blond moustache, and asked if Miss Warburton were in. The giant hesitating slightly in his responses, Molly lifted her lashes and looked up at him directly. An instant afterward, two brass-buttoned coat tails were speeding on her errand. Then Molly clasped her neat grey gloves demurely, and sat down in a corner to wait for his return.

Once inside the room of Miss Aileen Warburton, though, demureness vanished. Molly, casting aside her hat and gloves, plumped herself on a corner of the bed, and began to chatter.

"Oh, Auntie Aileen, it is the nicest thing to see you. You fairly smell of home. Were the aster beds in blossom, when you left? And the mallows around the lake? And has Briggs kept up the tennis court? And what about the new car? What is the new chauffeur like? Peter was such a good one; it was a shame to let him go, even if he did think he owned the car. Did you see the dogs, before you came away? And the new setter puppy? And do tell me, how is mother?" And, her proper climax reached, Molly stopped for breath.

Aileen, filling in the interval, was scarcely less eager. Always she had been fond of Molly, eldest child of her own eldest sister; now, after six weeks, she was conscious that it was good once more to be getting speech of her own flesh and blood. And Molly, in some ways, was more like her aunt than like her quiet mother. Indeed, the likeness, grown up during the final college years, was more complete than either of them knew. Molly, in short, was Aileen in italics.

Now, in return for Molly's exuberant details of her joyous wander-year, Aileen produced her bundle of bulletins from home. Then they fell upon the subject of their plans. First, though,—

"Auntie Aileen," Molly told her; "I am beginning to be afraid you are n't a proper chaperon for me."

"Why not, dear child?" Aileen queried, with ob-

vious inattention. Then she added more alertly, "Molly, did you get that frock in Paris?"

"Callot."

"It looks it. But what were you asking?"

Molly dropped her eyes and smoothed the meagre lap of her grey gown.

"There is n't much need to ask things, Auntie Aileen. Miss Ryerson has just brought me back from a house party. One of the men there was a Mr. Winterbourne who came over with you on the *Beatic*."

Aileen's nod was casual. She still was studying the Callot gown, wondering how anything so quiet could also be so arresting.

"Yes, I remember. He taught me to play poker patience."

Molly nodded.

"So he said. He also said many other things."

"Contrary to his normal custom," Aileen vouchsafed unkindly, considering the efforts made by Winterbourne to while away her idle moments.

Molly laughed, wrinkling up her nose where a dozen unmistakable brown freckles dotted the smooth skin.

"I did n't find it so, Auntie Aileen. He took to talk quite naturally, once he found out that I was sure to fill in all the pauses. It's the pause, I find, that upsets an Englishman. Once it really gets the upper hand, it seems to demoralize him completely. But, as for you and the *Beatic* —"

Aileen had a sudden realization that her niece was very young, a sudden fear lest she might become tiresome. It was one thing to know her as an in-

termittent factor of her sister's domestic circle. It might be a wholly different matter to have her for a daily and hourly comrade, especially during the weeks of continental wandering which invariably set the steadiest of nerves on edge.

"Well?" she asked patiently.

The patient note was not lost on Molly's heedful ears. It gave to her a sudden realization, also, a realization that Auntie Aileen could be teased. She glanced through her lashes at her aunt; then she lowered her eyes and spoke very gently.

"Mr. Winterbourne told me that Carl P. J. Clode was the lion of the ship; that everybody on board was watching him and talking about him; and that — it sounds slangy, Auntie Aileen; but I'm truly using just his words, because it's so much better to be accurate — and that it was generally agreed that Carl P. J. Clode was being personally conducted by Miss Aileen Warburton."

Aileen's cheeks flamed hotly, and her grey eyes blazed.

"Molly! How vulgar! And you listened to such —" Aileen pulled herself up short. Good breeding forbade a forcible word; no other, she felt, would be at all adequate.

"Of course I did, Auntie Aileen. And I was proud as Punch about it, too. Don't you suppose I was willing everybody at the table — he took me out, you know — should hear that my aunt had been having wonderful times on shipboard with Carl P. J. Clode?"

"Molly, don't!" Aileen spoke sharply.

"But, Auntie Ail —"

Aileen gathered up her dignity.

"Mr. Clode was very nice to all of us," she told Molly primly.

The girl ignored the implied rebuke.

"Mis-ter Clode!" she mocked her aunt. "The idea of speaking of Carl P. J. Clode like that. It sounds as casual as calling Marcus Aurelius *Mr. Antoninus*." Then she cast aside her mockery, and raised her eyes to Aileen's face. "Tell me about him," she demanded. "Does he look very famous?"

And then Aileen laughed.

"Molly, you sinful little gossip! One would think you were a child in bibs, talking about Santa Claus, not a young person well out of college and improved by a year of what the agencies call 'foreign travel.' Mr. Clode is n't a lion at all. He's just a quiet little gentleman who goes his own way, and is very nice to all the people he meets along it."

"Yes." Molly nodded gravely at the carpet. "That is just what Mr. Winterbourne told me. The only trouble, he told me, was that Mr. Clode takes pains not to meet too many of them."

Aileen glanced up sharply; then she confessed to herself that she was none the wiser for the glancing. Molly's wide hat shielded her face. Molly's whole pose, perched on a corner of the bed, was indicative of childish lack of guile. Aileen waited for an instant for Molly to speak again. Molly silent, though, Aileen judged it would be well for her to change the subject.

Therefore, she turned the conversation on the future. She discussed their plans for the Continent whither, one or two more visits done, they planned

to betake themselves. Molly had spent the winter on the Riviera and in Rome, coming northward with decent deliberation through the Alps and Germany and thence to England for the summer. It was all old ground to Aileen. Therefore, she professed to let Molly choose where they should spend October; but she guided Molly's choice so prudently that the girl was soon expressing lusty desire for Flanders, without the faintest notion that the desire had been begotten by her aunt. Ten minutes later, and in much the selfsame fashion, Molly was begging that they might return by the *Beatic*. Mr. Winterbourne had liked it, had told her so much about it that she really wanted to see it for herself, see — and the thick lashes dropped again — the top deck where they, some of them, used to have such good times.

"What about this Oxford invitation, Molly?" Aileen asked abruptly. "You are going?"

"If I am allowed." Molly made a grimace of disgust.

"Allowed? Why not?"

"It was n't in the bargain, and Miss Ryerson is very literal. She audits my engagement book as father's people do his bank. She does n't approve of my meeting Americans very often; she says it is a perversion of my opportunities. The fact is, Auntie Aileen, I think in reality she does n't quite approve of you; at least, not since she has seen your picture. She asked me if I had one, the morning after we first met Mr. Winterbourne. Miss Ryerson must be quite sixty," Molly added, with charming inconsequence.

Aileen smiled.

"Perhaps I'd better go back with you now, and have a talk with her," she suggested.

"Oh, don't!" Molly said hurriedly. "Really, Auntie Aileen, you'd best arrange things by writing. You see, I told her that the picture flattered. And mother is very biddable. There's no telling what she might do, if Miss Ryerson put the case to her quite plainly, and spelt her opportunities with a great, big O. Dear Auntie Aileen," and Molly, sliding off the corner of the bed, landed in a pathetic huddle at Aileen's feet; "do let me manage her, myself. I want so very much to get away from her, and just be with you."

"But, Molly, can you manage her alone?"

Then Molly lifted up her chin, and spoke with a delicious, albeit unconscious, mimicry of Miss Aileen Warburton in one of her periods of extreme hauteur.

"I should be sorry if I found a person that I could not manage, Auntie Aileen," she made deliberate answer.

An hour later, Molly gone upon her way to the National Gallery where, she had assured Miss Ryerson, she needed time to study the Titian things, Aileen sent a message to her temporary comrades that she was too tired for Ranelagh, for the afternoon. Instead, her conscience thus appeased by palliating a broken engagement with a specious fib, she sat herself down beside the window, and fell to pondering upon certain problems centring in Molly's recent conversation.

The pondering began with Molly's assertion as concerned her own ability to manage things. It

harpred a little bit insistently upon the effect which that ability would be likely to have upon their combined plans for the autumn. And then, before Aileen had come to any satisfactory decision on that score, her mind went off upon a sharp tangent which led it straight to Clode.

Clode, too, had managed things; less graciously, perchance, than Molly, but with a direct reasonableness which in part atoned for other lacks. Indeed, in looking backward over the seven days of her crossing, Aileen realized fully that the experience had been anything but the independence for which, at starting, she had planned. After her first preliminary hours of settling into her new quarters, her new routine, her days had been more or less mapped out for her by her different comrades, most of all by Clode. And Clode had rarely asked her to do things; he had had a trick of mentioning to some one else that she was going to do them. When, lapsing into normal convention, he had phrased his wishes in a question, his accent had supplied the flavour which he had omitted from his words.

Moreover, Aileen admitted to herself, she had obeyed him. Now and then, for the mere pleasant sake of opposition, she had refused to assent to some detail which he had planned. In the end, quite as a matter of course, she invariably had given in. She had eaten the words of her objections; she had followed out his plan. And the most striking fact of the whole matter had been Clode's quiet unconsciousness of his mastery. He took it as a matter of course, just as he took the falling of the evening dew upon the decks. That his plans were wise ones;

that, at each and every point, they made for the increased pleasure and protection of Miss Aileen Warburton: of this he was quite sure. Accordingly, he took the simplest method of seeing to it that they were carried out.

And now, after six weeks of fending for herself, of being, as Marie had phrased it, all at a loose end in her plans, Aileen, looking backward, told herself that it had been rather good to be managed. In theory, of course, it had gone against her grain. In fact, it had increased her comfort, seven-fold. But, as for Winterbourne's assertion that Clode was personally conducted by herself, as well might the six-weeks puppy in the butcher's alley lay claim to personally conducting the ship on which his master sails.

Aileen finished out her metaphor with a little sigh. Then she fell to summing up the benefits of independence. Were they ideal, or actual? What if she had been managed, crossing on the ship? What if she did have forebodings for the coming weeks, forebodings born of Molly's intrepid announcement as concerned herself? It was merely a restful interval that she was taking. When she chose, she would assert her old-time dominance, assert it and cause it to be felt. Besides, even on the *Beatic*, she might have been less supine than she had believed. Winterbourne was keen-sighted, a man of brain and understanding; he had told Molly that she had been the motive power behind Clode's plans. Winterbourne, looking on from outside, must have had a far more accurate perspective than she, an actor in the comedy, had gained.

Probably, without the realization of either Clode or herself, it had been she who had been the master spirit. Women did those things more delicately than men. Doubtless Clode, used to the more brutal grip of manly mastery, had been quite unaware of the delicate touch of polished steel. But, if it really came to a grip of wills between them! If ever she should try to stand up in opposition!

Aileen stiffened in her chair, in consonance with her stiffening purpose. Then, all at once, her stiffening left her. Not only was the memory of their final talk upon the deck a little disconcerting to any one who sought to vaunt herself upon her independence; but, back of that memory, so ignoble to her pride, was the regretful realization that, so long as she maintained her independence, so long was Carl Clode most unlikely to reappear within the working radius of their wills. True, he had left her free to summon him; but upon what conditions?

Without her knowledge, the past six weeks had wrought a curious change in Aileen's mental attitude towards Clode. She had now no more desire to marry him than she had had, that August noon when they had argued out the matter on the sunny top deck. She still was convinced that, for a woman like herself, marriage would mean a maximum of loss with only a minimum of gain to balance it. In other words, it was not so much Clode that she had rejected, as it had been the whole idea of matrimony. All her life, she had had a superlatively good time, never a better one than during her *Beatic* crossing. Many human elements had entered into that crossing. Clode was but one of them. And, after her years' experi-

ence, there was no especial reason that her good times should not go on into infinity.

Her reasoning was logical. Up to now, Aileen had been chums with many; one after one of that many had vanished into the past, leaving behind them no more trail across her consciousness than the *Beatic* had left across the summer sea. Now and then, one of the number had left some stretched nerve, to jar and throb a little at the mention of his name; but these, among whom Bernie Lennox stood out conspicuous, were the exceptions which made good the rule. Bernie was one exception. Clode was turning out another.

The six or seven weeks since Aileen had landed, had been varied and full of interest. There had been a visit to a friend whose army husband was temporarily stationed at Salisbury. There had been another visit to another friend whose clerical husband had a cure in Surrey. There had been a week in Paris, rioting among advance models of new clothes, and there had been another week of simple life and clotted cream in Devon. Now she was in London and on duty. Some third cousins, who had never crossed before, had besought her to pilot them through the mazes of the metropolis, and Aileen, after a grimace at herself by way of the mirror, had asked Marie to ring for telegraph blanks, that she might express her total joy at her impending charge.

Therefore, for ten days now, Aileen had breakfasted early and dined late. The intervening time, she had spent in devious promenades from Cheyne Row to the Tower, from Hertford House to the Crystal Palace, from the Cheshire Cheese to West-

minster Abbey and the Zoo. Moreover, to her no small discomfort, the third cousins had disdained taxis, and declared themselves in favour of the motor 'bus as means of transportation. They said they liked it, because it was so characteristic of the place. Aileen knew that she disliked it, because, if she rode inside, she wrecked her hat-crowns; and, if she rode on top, her shoulder-blades grew shiny with the friction born of jolting. However, they left their Baedekers in their bedrooms, and Aileen gained some measure of consolation out of that. Nevertheless, jaded by their fresh enthusiasm, she had been conscious of relief at the worldly-wise tone of Molly's young attempts at conversation.

In all these varied weeks, there had been other elements than ingenuous third cousins and worldly-wise young Mollies. Aileen had enjoyed these other contacts, yet she had found them just a little lacking in certain essentials she had never dwelt upon before. Her will was always law, her spoken whim the signal for implicit obedience. Now and then, though, it would have been good to find that the law had outstripped the will. Some men had a species of clairvoyance; some carried their lack of it to the point of utter density.

In short, she was missing Clode at every point, missing his care for her, his dominance over her. Much as she still rebelled at the idea of being managed, retrospect was teaching her that the process was very restful. Besides, it was so easy to compare Clode with other men whom she was meeting, so difficult to find the comparison to Clode's detriment. Clode, taken as a husband, would be as little to

her liking as any other husband, neither more, or less. Clode, taken as a friend, viewed in the perspective of the weeks since she had seen him, had it in his sturdy, downright, unimaginative self to dwarf most other men who sought to pose in that capacity. Nevertheless, had Aileen known that Clode was sitting in another one of the hotels in Northumberland Avenue, she would not have vouchsafed to him a single word of summons. She missed him; she knew she missed him. She also knew that their longer contact held within itself elements of potential danger. The best thing for everybody concerned was for her to depart to Belgium in the society of Molly. If she still felt a yearning to be managed, Molly would be at hand to do the managing.

Nevertheless, her decision taken and her needful bookings made, Aileen confessed to herself that Molly's management, however efficacious, would not be the same thing at all. There lay the ignominy. It was with a curious intensity of fierceness that Aileen faced her intermittent hours of longing to blot the whole *Beatic* episode out of the book of her experience.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

IN the end, the Belgian bookings were delayed, for other plans had arisen which, Aileen and Molly agreed, were entirely too charming to be thrown overboard.

It was in pursuance of these same plans that, one late September morning, two touring cars drew up outside the door of the hotel which Aileen temporarily had been calling home. Quiet Northumberland Avenue was quite shaken out of its peace by the resulting chatter and flurry of preparation. Brass-buttoned menials flew up and down the steps with hand luggage, or burrowed in the bottom of the cars, rearranging rugs and parcels. Marie, an impassive smile on her face and Aileen's dressing-bag in her hand, waited discreetly in the background ready, once the cars were started, to cross to Paddington and take the train to meet them at their first-night destination. Third cousins, dressed in British garments designed for moorland wear rather than for Piccadilly, grouped themselves upon the steps, ready to wave farewells, while Molly, in the smartest of brown Burberrys and motor bonnets, dodged back and forth among the servants and between the cars, happy and irresponsible as an Airedale puppy.

And, sitting behind the half-drawn blind in the club across the street, a man with ash-grey hair and thin, controlled lips sat looking out upon the busy

scene below. He was interested, envious; but not in the least unhappy. He was sure that his own time was bound to come; in that surety, he could well afford to wait.

Aileen came down the steps at last. She moved slowly, buttoning her glove, stopping for a word with Marie, another word, obviously of a financial nature, with the begilded head porter of the place. She was wearing her same gown of dusky blue that she had worn on shipboard; and, as she came slowly down the steps, the glitter of the bits of braiding on its collar matched the glitter of the hair above.

At the foot of the steps, she quickened her pace, and came forward, laughing, Molly's arm linked in hers.

"Am I the very last one? Disgraceful! But they telephoned up to my room that the other car had n't appeared, so I took my time. What can have become of it?"

One of the Englishwomen, swaddled in yards upon yards of mauve veiling, leaned out of the nearer car.

"I don't worry in the least," she said placidly. "Bobbie is always late; that is the reason we tried to get him to come up to town with us, and spend the night here. He thought he could n't, though. He always is behind on his engagements; and, besides, he waited to pick up an American man he'd asked, at the last minute. I told him he was very silly to add a total stranger to the party; but he appeared to think that you and Miss Molly would be homesick, the only Americans among so many English."

Molly pricked up her ears.

"Oh; but I like Englishmen," she urged promptly. "They are such nice, tidy creatures, and so careful about their pressings."

From among the rugs and the suitcases in the other car, a long, lean individual, unmistakably of British birth, unpacked himself and came to Molly's side. Divested of his motoring cap and goggles, he turned into the normal likeness of Winterbourne.

"Good for you, Miss Molly!" he said, with a bit more eagerness than, as it seemed to Molly's aunt, the case demanded. "But is that the very best that you can do for us?"

Molly stared at him through half-shut eyes.

"What else do you care about?"

"Our mental qualities, of course. Really, Miss Molly, you would n't measure up an Englishman by the amount of room he takes up, on a tailor's press-board?"

Molly shook her head thoughtfully.

"Must I get out another sort of yardstick?" she queried, her eyes on her clasped hands.

"You might have a try at it."

"Then, for a try," she looked up at him in sudden merry mockery; "I measure your moral sense by your vocabulary on the golf links, your mental development by your attitude to Marie Corelli, and your physical power by your ability to scramble up after a knock-down blow. There, will that do any better?"

"Miss Warburton," Winterbourne turned to Aileen; "your niece is really rather clever."

A smile hovered about the corners of Molly's lips.

"Rather like offering me a jam sandwich for my tea," she observed enigmatically.

"I beg your pardon."

"Oh, don't mind," she reassured him. Then she burst out in a wave of utter childishness, "Mr. Winterbourne, aren't you going to invite me to ride on the front seat of your car?"

Winterbourne's face betrayed uneasiness.

"I'm sure I'm very sorry," he said. "I am saving that seat, on the off-chance of Miss Warburton's taking it."

It was Aileen's turn to look disconcerted.

"Oh, don't mind me," she begged him swiftly.

"Yes; but I wanted you, you know," Winterbourne urged in his turn, and with scanty regard for Molly's probable feelings.

However, to all seeming, Molly had no feelings whatsoever. Instead, she proved to be the solitary member of the trio who was not disconcerted.

"Then I advise you to ask her quite nicely, Mr. Winterbourne. From what I know of Auntie Aileen's sporting instincts, you've only got to say the word, to turn the off-chance into the on one."

To say the word! The cadence of the phrase set Aileen's brain to ringing, sent memories whizzing through and through her mind. To her mortification, she felt the colour rising in her cheeks, and, to remove her unquiet face from Winterbourne's keen eyes, she turned away and feigned an interest in the windows opposite. Then her grey eyes dropped. Memories everywhere! Well inside the window, she had caught a glimpse of ash-grey hair, and some subtle association of ideas had led her

to imagine a likeness to Clode in the outline of the shapely head.

It was with no small degree of relief that she heard the whirring of a car come near and stop, heard the enthusiastic greetings and reproaches hurled out upon the missing Bobbie.

Bobbie, however, was impenitent.

"I could n't help the silly train's being late; could I? I've been waiting there outside Euston for fully half an hour; had every constable in the place ordering me to move on. I promised them I would, when the train was in; and then, by Jove, something or other jammed, and the car would n't start. It took me twenty minutes, lying flat on my back between the wheels, to find out the trouble. Miss Warburton," for now the belated introductions were in order; "I'm jolly glad to make your acquaintance and my apologies in the same breath. I do hope you're not too tired of waiting. And may I introduce one of my old friends, a fellow-countryman of yours —"

Aileen had lifted her eyes from the pavement whither she had moved them, after that instant of fancied likeness seen in the window opposite. Now, as she looked up, memory lost itself in extreme surprise. Out of the car stepped Stanway.

"I wish you would explain this mystery," she asked him when, greetings over, she and Stanway found themselves packed into the back seat of one of the cars and whirring rapidly towards Highgate.

Stanway laughed.

"No mystery about it, Miss Warburton. It is merely the result of chance."

"A most erratic chance," she told him. "With all the people one meets, it is a strain on one's mathematical sense to believe that three of us who were on the *Beatic* and more or less together, should land inside the narrow limits of one English motor party."

"Three?"

"Ourselves, and Mr. Winterbourne."

"Who is he?"

Aileen indicated the car ahead of them, where Molly sat enthroned on the front seat.

"One of those tall Englishmen who used to play bull with Mr. Clode."

"Oh, yes. At least, I don't remember much about them," Stanway said negligently; and then he turned to their neighbour in the farther corner of the seat, speaking across Aileen.

Aileen, dropping out of the conversation for a moment, let her eyes rest on Stanway thoughtfully. He was emphatically the same Stanway, unchanged, unmodified. His surface manner was, perhaps, a shade less chastened than when they last had met; but, as an offset to this natural reaction of his spirits, he wore his mourning livery more ostentatiously even than he had done of yore. He was at that state of reminiscent grief which, in a woman, expresses itself in dull jet dangles and in scraps of folded muslin pinned about the throat. These denied to him, Stanway took his melancholy out in serious neckties, and in the banded left sleeve of his motor coat; above all, in his cap. Indeed, his cap alone betrayed his tailor as a man of genius. Save in the days of a recently defunct royalty,

no such expressive headgear had traversed the streets of London. Even the flippant Molly, confronted with it during the instant of introduction, had lowered the corners of her lips in respectful sympathy, and brought her voice down to the key customarily used in phrases beginning with the words, "How natural he —" It had taken Winterbourne's effusive offers of the front seat of his car to restore her to her ordinary optimism.

Aileen, meanwhile, was eyeing Stanway with no small amusement. The six weeks since they had parted had straightened out the lines of her perspective; the landward setting of her later memories had sharpened the outlines of a picture which was slightly blurry with the sea. She liked Stanway, taken in moderation. She had enjoyed him, while he lasted. She was glad to see him again now. However, she had not been conscious of missing him in the least; and her gladness had been tintured with no small amusement at finding him once more girt with his harness of self-righteous melancholy. As a rule, in her experience, a lightening of one's mourning had been permanent, mark of a greater change to come. With Stanway, to all appearing, it was but a passing phase in the recurring cycle of his woe. The late Mrs. Stanway must have been a woman of rarely persistent character, if one might judge by her effect upon her husband.

But Stanway, leaning back into his corner, broke in upon Aileen's meditations.

"Speaking of the *Beatic*, Miss Warburton, have you seen Clode lately?"

"Not since he put us into our cab at Euston, the night we landed."

"He's in London."

"Really? He went directly on to Paris."

"For a week. He's back in London, now, though. I was going through town, a week ago, and met him in St. James Street. He told me he might be staying on indefinitely; I was sure you must have met him."

"London is large. Besides, I've not been here long, myself."

"Ten days," he told her coolly.

"How did you know?" Her voice was not wholly indicative of pleasure.

"The Pall Mall banks have registers, to say nothing of the foreign editions of the New York papers," Stanway said calmly; "and the name is not a common one. In fact," he laughed; "I'm owing it to the *Herald* that I have my invitation for this especial motor party."

"Did you advertise for it?" she made prompt and flippant question, for Stanway's accent threatened to become portentous.

"Not so bad as that; but next thing to it," he responded quietly, secure that, in the humming of the car, his words would not be overheard. "Bobbie and I are old friends, from the days when we were gamins of the Parisian Bohemia, trying to learn the A. B. C. of writing. Many's the time we've dined together on bread and garlic, and washed it down with wine watered to the point of complete extinction. Oh, yes; we had our bank accounts; but we had a youthful notion that we must see life

raw, by way of making our novitiate. For me, I'm glad I did it. Bobbie chucked the game too soon to have it count for much."

Aileen's interest quickened suddenly, just as, once before when they had been on shipboard, it had quickened in answer to Stanway's accent in speaking of the sea. Now, for a second time, it seemed that she had gained a glimpse of the humanity beneath the platitude. Moreover, as once before, she found the humanity likable.

In another instant, though, Stanway had roused himself, burying the humanity from sight.

"But, about this trip, Miss Warburton: that's another story. The invaluable *Herald* told me that Bobbie's sister was getting up a motor party in honour of one of my American friends. In consequence, I came up to town for a day, and left a card at Bobbie's club. The sequel of the event was too obvious to be avoided. Here I am."

"But you didn't tell him that we crossed together."

Stanway shrugged his shoulders.

"One doesn't tell personal details by wire," he said. "There's danger of their needing to be explained or amplified. No. If you wish the accurate record: I left a card for Bobbie. Bobbie wired me, 'Motoring York twenty-sixth, come along.' I wired Bobbie, 'Yes, Euston, nine-ten morning twenty-sixth,' and there our interchange of information ended. Coming down from Euston, he's been in too bad a temper to make it wise for me to try to put in a word of any sort."

Aileen nodded at the front seat of the car.

"As I observe. Then I shall have to exonerate you, Mr. Stanway, from any intentional slight to my egotism. But, tell me, what do you think of my young niece?"

The occupant of the other corner rose up in matronly enthusiasm at the question, and, for a while, the talk was general. Bit by bit, though, Aileen allowed herself to drop out of it. Stanway, to be sure, was talking at his best, talking with more than half an eye on her; but Stanway, for the moment, was powerless to hold his own against the fascination of the car.

Highgate now was to the right of them, and they were buzzing smoothly forward over the crest of Hampstead Heath, all billowy grey beneath a lowering, greying sky. Long rags of paler mist dangled across the faces of the distant hills; but Harrow spire flashed into view and out again as, dropping from the crest, the cars shot northward on the first lap of their long, long run.

It was one of the soft grey days of coming autumn, days when the mists hang low, yet never send down rain. The roads between their green hedgerows were firm and level as a dark brown floor. Now they rambled along lazily among farmsteads where the dwellings were dwarfed completely by the mammoth hayricks, tidy polyhedrons that might have been shaved into symmetry by the scythe of Father Time. Now they stretched out across a reach of level fields, all pinky purple with the blossoming heather, or humped themselves to bridge a bit of permanent way. Then suddenly they straightened themselves and went shooting through a roadside village, the

outer houses completely bowered in clustering green, the inner ones planted close along the village street, their open doorways giving enticing glimpses of courts and gardens hidden in the rear. Then out into the country again, through hedgerows, through patches of gnarly beechwoods, through acres of purpling heather, always with the drooping rags of mist before them, always with the breeze in their faces and, in their ears, the steady drumming of the car.

It was a full twenty miles, before Aileen spoke again. Then suddenly she cut athwart Stanway's desultory talk with Bobbie, who, by this time, had motored himself into more than a semblance of good humour.

"Mr. Stanway, do you remember sunset in the peak of the *Beatic*?" she asked him, just a bit irrelevantly, as it seemed to Bobbie.

Stanway nodded; his face supplied the needed comment. Moreover, the swiftness of his comprehension did more than a little to cause Aileen's later forgiveness for the human platitude he assumed, as his most normal guise.

During the week that followed, Aileen's moments of forgiveness multiplied. From day to day, she was shifted from one car to another, as her various hosts clamoured for her society. Meanwhile, only an ardent mathematician would have plotted out the unduly large proportion of the days that Stanway was shifted with her. Not that Stanway was at all insistent. He was too well-bred for that, likewise too wily. He merely stood back in an apparent self-effacement which, however, did not keep him

from edging gradually towards the car in which Aileen sat enthroned. Or else, he mislaid essentials of his packing, called cheerily to the driver of Aileen's temporary car that he was not to wait, a train would overtake them long before noon. Then, the other cars well out of the way, he reappeared, his face all smiles, to load himself and his profuse apologies into the waiting car.

Aileen would not have been Aileen, had she failed to see through these manœuvres; she would not have been quite feminine, had she failed to derive a certain pleasure from them. She rebuked the chaffing Molly stonily, however. The pleasure was for her, not for all the appreciative Mollies in creation.

Riding, for the most part, on the front seat of the car, Aileen had little opportunity for talk with Stanway in the rear. That little, though, she found enjoyable. After her weeks of visiting and of shopping, and of dutifully doing London landmarks, the long days out of doors, days of swift, effortless motion, were bringing back to her the mood of ship-board, bringing her back into the mood where she had been aware of Stanway's spiritual kinship. And Stanway, realizing this, realizing that it was the consequence of events, not personality, waited, quiet, and allowed events to have their way. Seen for a second time, this time under conditions so totally guaranteed and chaperoned, he found the lure of Aileen's womanhood more potent, even, than he had thought.

Beneath the riotous exhibition of his woe, moreover, Stanway's heart was honest. He knew that,

for him, the future still was the future. However, he also knew, or thought he knew, that the earlier *nevermore* was changing into a possible *some day*. The change, though, would be possible only as it might include Aileen. Moreover, for the present, it must wait.

And Stanway, as he was proving now to all observers, was a master of the art of patient waiting. Always somewhere within Aileen's especial circle, he yet showed no impatience over being relegated, every now and then, to its extreme circumference. From that circumference, he never failed to send her a smile, a glance, a word of comprehension over the intervening British heads. Never by word or sign reminding his hosts that he and Aileen were older friends than had been expected, he yet hedged Aileen herself about with the comfortable sense that, if she chose to turn the angle of her conversation backward, he would be at hand, ready to catch her reference and toss it back to her, unharmed by any lack of comprehension. Briefly, he kept himself well in the background; but he was always there.

Just once, however, he came into the foreground.

It was the last afternoon but one of their wandering. Three days before, reluctantly they had turned their faces homeward, and now, the north-land well behind them, they came spinning down through Warwickshire and into Woodstock. Molly, with the appetite of her years, forthwith demanded a high tea; but Winterbourne, derisive of her greed, had halted at the Bear just long enough to file an order for service later on. That done, he had gone whirling up the street and, with the other cars be-

hind him, turned in beneath the mammoth trees of Blenheim Park.

Molly, her hunger for cakes forgotten in her thirst for knowledge, demanded to be taken through the house, and fell to counting out the needful tale of sixpences. Aileen, however, begged off from the tour of inspection. After her ten days of devotion to the third cousins, historic interiors had come to pall on her a little. Instead, with Stanway loitering at her side, she left the house behind her, sauntered down the lawn and across the little bridge.

At the end of the bridge, they halted, their mutual consent asked and given without a spoken word. Leaning on the rail, they stared about them, reveling in the perfect peace. Below them, a trio of little boys were running to and fro among the trees, testing the vaunted echo with the fullest power of their lusty lungs. From somewhere behind the house, a herd of deer, slim, brown bits of gracefulness, came trotting swiftly down, pausing occasionally as if in sudden fear, then trotting on again, to plunge into the stream below the bridge. An instant later, the wet gleaming of their flanks had vanished among the distant trees. And, silent, fearless, stolid, a flock of sheep cropped the grass on the opposite slope at whose top the column of the first of the Dukes keeps, taciturn and grim, its watch and ward over the palace of his latter-day descendants.

Aileen, her elbows on the rail, was drinking in the restfulness of the still greenery about her, the absolute peace in which the warlike Duke was sleeping out the years, when Stanway's voice, low but insistent, broke in upon her formless reverie.

"It is like a bit out of the old days on the *Beatic*, Miss Warburton."

Loath to break her dream utterly, she merely nodded in silence.

"It has been a good week," he went on slowly. "Better than I care to tell you now. In some ways, it has been worth all the rest of my holiday. Miss Warburton —"

"Yes," she answered, as he hesitated, waiting for her word; and, answering, her accent was calmly level.

Her permission granted, he went on a little hurriedly.

"No; not quite yet, at least —" Then, blundering, he fell silent.

Aileen waited. She saw no need to help him across his steep stile.

Stanway had a minute of obvious struggling with a self-consciousness rare in him. Then he steadied, and spoke firmly.

"It is not easy to put my meaning into words, Miss Warburton. It is less easy, because I never had expected to face this especial need. It is only this: some day, the time is sure to come when I shall wish to explain to you exactly what this week has meant to me. When it does come," and now his voice rang with a sudden dominance as alien to his nature, or so it seemed to Aileen, as had been his self-consciousness of the moment just before; "when it does come, Miss Warburton, I shall count upon your willingness to hear me out."

And then, without waiting for reply, he turned abruptly, and led the way back to the palace steps

where an enthusiastic Molly, her thirst for information fully quenched, was loudly clamouring anew for scones and tea.

It was only later on, in her own room with Marie brushing out her yellow hair, that Aileen fully grasped the nature of Stanway's attempted option on her future.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

BRUGES may have finer inns than the little *Rose d'Argent*; but she surely has not one more charming, more racy of the soil. Two rooms wide and ever so many rooms deep, its two steep-stepped gables look out upon the *Gran' Place* and the old brown Belfry opposite. The architecture behind the gables is distinctly casual. One enters, luggage and all, by way of the dining-room. One goes up a dark and narrow stairway to be welcomed, halfway up, by the radiant smiles of Madame, French, voluble, and kindly. At the top, one hesitates whether to go into the drawing-room, all haircloth and Berlin-wools, or to follow one's luggage down a narrow hallway which only a confirmed dipsomaniac could regard as straight.

Inside the bedrooms, lighted from a long, narrow court by day, lighted by one small candle each at night, there are huge, soft beds on aged mahogany bedsteads, there are microscopic wash-handstands, and there is one plain little wooden chair for each room. The locks on the doors are rudimentary; now and then, at crises of the toilet, it is possible to turn the key; but it is easier by far to move the wash-handstand against the door. And, from four in the morning until ten at night, the narrow court beneath the windows resounds with the clattering of a public

pump handle, and with the musical clash of sabots on the cobble roadway.

Downstairs, it is possible to eat under a roof, if the weather is too bad. Else, one eats underneath the awning that covers the edge of the sidewalk. Eating, one is torn in spirit: whether to revel in the cookery of the chef, whose kitchen opens sociably off from Madame's drawing-room downstairs; or whether to give one's whole attention to the life in the Place and to the Flemish cavaliers and dandies who come to sit at the tables, eating toothsome goodies and drinking native beer.

In the Rose d'Argent, luxury is quite ousted by the extreme of comfort. The stray tourist, usually of English extraction, owns the entire establishment, and is the chosen friend of the buxom Madame, who pervades all things to their common benefit. Madame's oldest son is the head waiter and a large proportion of the staff. Madame's nephew cooks, with frequent advice and occasional assistance from no less a person than Madame herself; and the results of his cookery might put to shame the Cecil or the Ritz.

Not that anybody ever analyzes the cookery of the Rose d'Argent, however. After the first few moments of devout thanksgiving for its quality, one consumes it as a matter of course, so lost is one in the interest of the life around him, in the kaleidoscopic human picture moving across the open, cobbled Place. Here a group of Belgian gossips in their full black Spanish cloaks and snowy caps pause, basket on arm, to exchange the tidings gathered in their marketing. There a quartette of officers, their red

or pale orange facings smart to the point of extreme aggressiveness, come clanking around the corner of the *Marché-aux-Oeufs* and fling themselves down at one of the small tables, loudly demanding beer. A moment later, with a warning hiccough, a toy train meanders in from some point hidden behind the *Halles*, and halts in front of the Government Buildings, puffing and sneezing with a furious sense of its own importance quite out of proportion to its size.

And ever and anon, out from the tall brown Belfry opposite floats a thread of melody, falling down across the city, chiming the hour for English tourist and for artist resident, for gossips in their Spanish cloaks and officers with orange facings, falling, falling down to mingle with the musical clank of the sabots of the little boys, playing about the monument in the open square below.

Everywhere, even to the little children in their wooden sabots, is the look of mellow age. The sneezing, hiccoughing little train might have been packed into Noah's ark; no modern hand has fashioned the full black cloaks and hoods; no modern brain has cast those mellow bells, or designed the two gables of the Rose d'Argent, the one with twelve steps to its summit, the other one with six. No modern civilization has developed Madame; Madame's white-capped nephew is the product of all the ages from Esau's mother down. Indeed, one afternoon early in October, the only modern thing in sight was Molly, perched in the deep-seated window of the drawing-room which opened on the square.

"Auntie Aileen, you are a genius," she was saying

to some one in the room behind her. "How did you ever discover this delectable spot?"

The answer was inaudible. Then Molly, now leaning a little farther out the window than safety and decorum made advisable, spoke once more.

"My father? My reverend and conventional father? Never! Why, he insists on the Continental and the Des Indes and all such places; he would die of this. Oh, in his student days? And you have kept track of the place, all this time? You've not been here before?"

Slowly Aileen tore herself from a rapt contemplation of the antimacassars on the chairs, each a picture in itself, and came to join Molly in the open window.

"Not to stay. When I came here before, I was with the Leverings; they'd never see the charm of such a place. In fact, Bruges bored them badly. They sat inside, and played patience, and squabbled about their picture postcards, while I went exploring. One day, I stayed out for luncheon, and came here. You like it, Molly?"

"Ador —" Then Molly craned her neck once more. "Oh, Auntie Aileen, can't we go down to dinner now? The most beautiful soldier boy has just appeared. He is pale yellow on all the edges that poor, dear Mr. Stanway has done up in black, and his moustaches look like the yoke things that they use for buckets. Can't we go down now?"

Aileen shook her head.

"Molly! One does n't dine at five in the afternoon. Besides, we've only just come; we shall frighten Madame, if we appear too greedy."

"But I'm hungry," Molly persisted; "and also interested. Do let's go down for tea."

Aileen shook her head once more.

"You're out of England, Molly; one has chocolate over here, chocolate and brioche. If you really can be hungry, after the size of the dinner you ate on board, we can go out and have some chocolate, I suppose. I saw a good little shop, on our way up from the station."

"You must have an observing nature," Molly remarked calmly at the square below. "It took all my energy to keep up with our porter, and not to lose my hat off in the process. Where are you going now?"

"Just to speak to Marie, and to get some gloves. I'll be back in just a minute, though; then we'll have our chocolate, and go for a walk."

Her minute proved to be a long one. Coming back, however, she found Molly in no mood to complain of neglect or boredom. Indeed, entering the room, Aileen's first impression was that Molly had gone off without her. From inside the room, the girl was totally inconspicuous, so prone she lay across the window seat, her toes barely touching the carpet, her eager head outside. From the outer viewpoint, though, Aileen questioned a little the inconspicuousness. A vivid yellow head aureoled in a wide black hat and joined to the good half of a slim blue body: this vision, hanging from the upper windows of the *Rose d'Argent*, was a sight to jar the nerves even of tourist-ridden Bruges.

Molly, however, deftly warded off any possible comment upon her manners.

"Auntie Aileen, this is the sweetest place I ever saw. Listen!" And she held up her hand for silence, as the bells sang out from the tower above. Then, the bells silent, she went on alertly, "I wonder how I'd look in one of those full black cloaks. They are so graceful, and just think how useful they'd be on ship! And hear the tinkle of those sabots! Yes, I know that the T is silent but the word rattles much better, when one sounds it. Fancy playing tag in the shadow of the Belfry! Are you ready? Wait till I put on my gloves."

It took time to smooth the long gloves into place and button them; it took more time to readjust the wide black hat. And, all the time that she was busy, Molly kept up her stream of chatter.

"What I like best about this place, Auntie Aileen, next to dear old Madame and the yellow-bordered little officers, is the way it seems to be free from tourists."

"We may be late for them," Aileen suggested absently, her mind on chocolate.

"Perhaps. Anyway, in all the time I've been there in the window, I've only seen just one. Of course, I've seen some English people going by; but they all were going somewhere, as if they lived here, and a good many of them had dogs. But this man was a tourist. He looked rather nice, though."

"Are n't we nice, Molly? Look out for that last stair."

Molly shrugged her pretty shoulders.

"Yes, of course. But you know what I mean, Auntie Aileen. Just one or two tourists can be perfectly nice; it's when they come in crowds that

they are awful. And poor old Miss Ryerson always insisted we must go to places just when everybody else was going there. She always carried Baedeker in her hand; open, too. But this man did look nice, I must say; he was the kind of American one likes to see about."

They were on the sidewalk now. Turning, Aileen eyed her niece a little quizzically.

"An American? Really, Molly, you must have looked him over carefully."

Molly laughed, unabashed.

"So I did, Auntie Aileen; I was about it, when you came in. I liked him; he was little, but he looked such a manly sort, with a mouth that shut tight, and wide, wide shoulders. For all he was a tourist, he did n't slouch. He crossed the Place, and came in under our awning; but he was n't there, when we came out. After all," Molly gave a reminiscent sort of sigh; "he was rather old to be quite interesting; he had hair exactly the colour of wood ashes."

Aileen's powers of observation had made good. The chocolate shop proved to be such a success that she and Molly, forgetful of their promised walk, loitered there till dusk, alternately feeding bits of brioche to the dog who, claiming to own the shop, yet begged flagrantly for all their purchases, and chattering to the dog's mistress in a jargon made up of all the tongues in vogue at Babel. Moreover, they came back again, next day.

To both Aileen and Molly, that next day was well-nigh unforgettable. The day before, Bruges had seemed chiefly Rose d'Argent and Gran' Place, with the chocolate shop and Madame thrown in for good

measure. Both aunt and niece, asked, would have confessed themselves a little tired, their eagerness just a little jaded. Their crossing to Ostend would have been a bit exhausting in itself, so rough and choppy was the channel, so blue the sail-flecked waters, so full of ozone the crispy breeze. It was invigorating, but tiring in its very joyousness; and it had followed hard upon the heels of their week of motoring. Indeed, they had driven slowly into Northumberland Avenue, one night, to find Marie there ahead of them and busy, packing for Charing Cross and Dover in the morning. After an experience so energetic, it was with a sense of absolute relief that they had settled themselves in the slow little Belgian express at Ostend, ready for their hour's ride across to Bruges.

Judged by their next morning mood, it would have been hard to tell which was the younger, which the more girlish, Molly or her aunt. After Molly's chastening experiences with Miss Ryerson, after Aileen's decorous English visitings, the irresponsible charm of Bruges came, tonic-wise, to reassure them as to the inherent joyfulness of life. Their toilet, hemmed in by the limits of a nine-inch looking-glass — for *mirror* would be a palpable misnomer for such misty depths as those that swallowed up all detail of their features — and a battered copper jug holding a scanty pint of boiling water; their coffee and rolls, eaten on the sunny sidewalk, with silver-laced *gens d'armes* and gold-laced soldiers, with white-capped dames, and boys in clattering sabots, and clumsy, thick-tailed mongrel dogs passing in ceaseless parade before them while they ate; their idle wandering over low

stone bridges and along narrow stone quays beside canals whose other margins were bordered with garden walls overgrown with ivy, overhung with bits of weeping willow or of sturdier fruit-bearing trees, now gleaming purple in the morning sun, past towers and spires and step-roofed gables, past walls of every shade of pink and yellow, of cream and dusky green, roofed in with every tint of red and brown; their straying into one shop to buy pears for Molly's voracious appetite, into another to choose a bit of lace which had caught Aileen's eye, into a third one to buy a burly loaf of bread to feed the swans, grey, brown, and gleaming white, who came swimming after them, once they halted: all these adventures, idle, leisurely, yet filled a morning crammed to the brim with interest which, to all seeming, was skimmed from the very cream of ordinary human life.

Luncheon ended, Molly turned discursive. First of all, though, she put her elbows on the table, and launched a direct question.

"Auntie Aileen, what do you really think of Mr. Stanway?" she demanded, with the uncompromising candour born of youth.

"I like him very much," her aunt responded, with a temperateness which was little short of the astounding, considering the nature of Stanway's final words to her at Blenheim Park.

Molly propped her chin upon her palms.

"I wondered," she said tersely.

Aileen's conscience led her to put a question, in her turn.

"But why?"

"Oh, I was a little curious to see what you would

make of him. You see, you have had more experience with such people than I have."

In spite of herself, Aileen laughed at the accent of elderly meditation which Molly had contrived to throw into her final words. It was to those final words which she now assented.

"Yes, a few years, Molly. Still, Mr. Stanway does n't impress me as being at all an uncommon type."

"I did n't know," Molly said, with a recurrence of her disconcerting frankness. "Sometimes, it is hard to tell. Still, Mr. Winterbourne says he really is n't the bally ass he seems."

"Molly!"

"I'm only quoting," Molly reassured her, casting down her eyes; then she lifted them again in conscious innocence. "Of course, Auntie Aileen, I would n't think of using such expressions, just of myself."

"I should hope not," Aileen put in, with fervour.

"But I always do think it's best to quote people accurately," Molly added, with a glint in her eyes which belied her extreme guilelessness. "If you don't, you get the credit of inventing things to suit yourself. Gossip is like your luggage; it is always a good idea to tag it with your proper initials and address." Then she harked back to her original subject. "Then you really like him, Auntie Aileen?"

Again Aileen's conscience bit her sharply.

"After a fashion, yes."

"They say he writes poetry," Molly said, after a moment, and her voice was as the voice of one who chronicles an incriminating fact.

"Yes."

"Did you ever see any of it?" Molly demanded, and now there was no disguising the amused tolerance of her tone.

Aileen's bad angel instructed her to be literal in her accuracy.

"He read me some of it."

"Aun-tie Ail-een! But perhaps you asked him?"

"Molly dear, if we have finished our luncheon, what if we go upstairs?"

"No dodging!" Molly warned her sternly. "Did you really ask him to read his things to you?"

"I told him I'd be glad to hear them," Aileen quibbled.

"I thought so. He looks it," Molly said uncompromisingly. Then she digressed. "Who's dead?"

It was scanty wonder that Aileen failed to follow her. Molly's mind, once it went into action, was analogous to the knight in chess.

"Dead, Molly?"

"Yes, dead. Very dead, to judge from the blackness and the shininess of his mourning. In fact, I more than half believe he's dyed his hair, by way of carrying out the harmonious whole."

"You mean Mr. Stanway? Please don't be flippant, Molly." And Aileen once more had an uncomfortable realization of her niece's youth. "He is in mourning for Mrs. Stanway."

"Mother, or wife?" Mollie queried briefly; not that she was flippant now, but merely curious.

"His wife."

Molly's hands fell to the table. She lifted up her

heavy lashes and fixed her blue eyes accusingly upon her aunt.

"Really? How very sneaky of him!" she said, with a healthy young resentment which came from her girlish sympathy for the departed Mrs. Stanway.

"Sneaky, Molly?" Aileen's tone betrayed surprise. Sneakiness was the last vice of which she, out of her longer experience, would have accused the too prolix and outspoken Stanway.

But Molly held her ground.

"Yes, sneaky," she maintained sturdily while, gathering up her gloves and purse, she slowly rose from the sidewalk table. "He — Auntie Aileen," and now Molly's voice bristled with points of horror born of her arrogant young standards; "he flirted."

For just one moment, Aileen coloured. Then her sense of humour triumphed over her displeasure, and she laughed.

"Molly," she asked; "did you ever hear of the repartee between the pot and kettle?"

However, Molly scored in her reply.

"Not fair, Auntie Aileen," she protested promptly. "The cases are n't parallel at all. I have n't a dead wife."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

LATER on, in the chocolate shop, Molly recurred again to her same subject. Aileen sought to listen patiently, for she knew, out of her own personal experience, that youth has its own obsessions, as much more persistent as they are less momentous than those of riper years. Of course, it was a bore to have Molly dissecting her aunt's chosen comrades in the light of her own young imitations of psychology. Still, everybody now and then was bound to be a trifle boring; and, taken all in all, Molly had not been tiresome in the least. Instead, the very exuberance of her youth, her saucy irresponsibility, had made her the most refreshing comrade possible. With Molly at one's elbow, one never had a moment to ponder upon ultimate verities, such as the total sum of gains and losses bred by matrimony.

To be sure, now and then upon their motor trip, Molly had been a little obvious. Now and then, she had edged off from their general group, sometimes with Stanway at her side, but more often with Winterbourne. Indeed, it was a curious thing about Molly, Aileen noticed, that she rarely edged away alone. Upon the infrequent occasions when she did so, she never was permitted to be alone for long. For such a self-reliant young woman as was Molly, it appeared that she was in need of an astounding amount of masculine protection. Moreover, her need

always was made good. And Aileen, who, all her life, had been in the habit of focussing upon herself all the unoccupied attention within reach, yet conscientiously deplored this trick of Molly's. She even meditated speaking a word of remonstrance to her niece. She held her peace, though, but less out of her convictions than from respect for Molly's powers of repartee.

Stanway, upon their motor trip, had bestowed on Molly the ponderous devotion of an admiring uncle. Whenever Aileen had chanced to be in hearing, she had found Stanway offering the girl conversational lollipops which Molly gobbled avidly, albeit without the slightest tendency to mistake them for the bread of life or for heavenly manna. As for Winterbourne, he had been at some pains to explain to Aileen, early in their journeyings, that he was amused by Molly, as an incarnation of the American spirit, and further liked her because of her manifest resemblance to her aunt.

Aileen's retort had been obvious.

"Am I another incarnation?" she had inquired, with slight asperity.

Winterbourne, being English, was downright, and too deliberate to dodge. Wherefore, —

"Oh, but you are older," he made slightly disconcerting answer. "I fancy you've had it a bit soaked out of you. However, never mind whatever else one thinks about Miss Molly, one must admit that she's a jolly entertaining little beggar," and then once more he blundered; "besides being exactly what you must have been, at the same age."

Thereafter, Winterbourne proceeded to let Molly

entertain him to his heart's content. Moreover, Aileen found him far too much absorbed in the process of being entertained to have a proper realization of her own manifest preoccupation when he sought her out to issue bulletins upon the fact.

However, taken all in all, her youth and her prettiness and her Americanism considered, Aileen admitted that Molly had behaved extremely well. It was not the girl's fault that her English lines had fallen among men of abnormal susceptibility; not her fault that Stanway should have seen in her, and commented upon the seeing, a haunting likeness to his departed wife. Not that he had commented on the fact to Molly, he explained to Molly's aunt; it would upset completely the girl's blithe poise, did she feel that his bits of talk with her were thus shadowed by his melancholy. Neither, it must be confessed, did Aileen hand on the comment. She was convinced that Stanway had offered it in all sincerity. Nevertheless, she quite agreed with him that it might be upsetting to her niece's poise, albeit not exactly in the sense which Stanway had had in mind. Indeed, there were certain hours when even Aileen found herself regretting Molly's sense of humour. However, Molly's sense of the ridiculous was quite as keen, when it concerned herself, as when it was exercised on other people. For the sake of that, Aileen felt that she could put up with much, even to Molly's monologues upon the subject of their fellow-travellers.

This time, however, Molly's observations took her quite unprepared. To Aileen's mind, it was a far, far cry from brioche to widowers. And Molly spoke

without so much as a prefatory clearing of her throat.

"Auntie Aileen, do you think it's really nice for a man to be wearing mourning for one woman, while he is flirting with another?"

"Hush, Molly!"

Molly glanced around the shop.

"There is n't anybody here who knows a word of English, but the dog. I taught him 'sit up,' yesterday; but that has n't any especial bearing on the subject."

"You can't ever tell."

"Ask for something you want, and see," Molly retorted promptly. "There is n't a linguist in the place. Else, I'd not be talking gossip. But, really, if I had a husband, and died, it seems to me I'd rather he either stuck to me, or else got over me altogether, not combined the processes."

"It takes a little time, Molly."

"Exactly. That's the trouble. Mr. Stanway is trying to use the same time for both functions, like trying to make one of Madame's funny little blankets cover up the pillows and tuck in at the foot. He'd much best use it first in one place, then in the other; else, he'll find himself chilled in both spots at once. Were his poems good?"

Aileen gasped at the sharpness of the transition. Even yet, she knew not Molly.

"Some of them were very sweet and dainty," she replied.

"Sweet! Hm!" Molly's tone was uncompromising. "*Some of them!* Poor Mr. Stanway! He never read them to you but the once."

"There was n't time."

"There 's always time, when one gets an appreciative listener," Molly retorted sagely. "We had a girl in the same house at Smith, and she used to come into our room and read her poems — *verses*, she called them; she was quite conceited — while we were putting up our hair. Of course, poor Mr. Stanway could n't well do that; but there were times enough — Did Mr. Clode hear any of them?"

"Oh, no."

Molly's eyes narrowed at the swift reply.

"No; naturally he would n't," she assented. Then, without vouchsafing any explanation of her final words, she pushed the dog gently from her lap and rose. At the door, she faced about alertly. "Auntie Aileen, I just saw my tourist."

Aileen, making change in unfamiliar coinage, looked up abstractedly.

"Did you? Where?"

"Passing in the street. I am sure he is American; really, he looks nice. I'd like to get another glimpse of him; he is the first American I have seen since we left London."

But Aileen refused to wax enthusiastic. It was taking all her surplus mental energy to multiply brioche into francs. That done at last, though, she looked up at the impetuous Molly with a smile.

"Perhaps we'll meet him on the market, in the morning, Molly," she suggested.

And Molly, perforce, was fain to be content with that slim chance.

The chance, slim over night, vanished entirely

with the dawn. Long before breakfast time, Molly and then Aileen were wakened by the thudding of heavy raindrops on the cobbles of the court; and then their drowsy senses straightway became aware of bleak grey skies and a dank, depressing atmosphere which urged them to drag Madame's homespun blankets closer about their ears, and spend the day tucked up in bed. Heavy-footed Belgian Louise forestalled their desires, however, and came clattering to their doors with her copper pint-pots of hot water, without the formality of waiting for their ring. In the end, Molly's optimism was dominant. Clothed in the smartest of wet-weather tweeds and smiling defiance at the rain, she joined her aunt in the breakfast-room.

"Auntie Aileen, you sneak! Or are you just extravagant? By the way, good-morning. But surely you're not going to wear that frock out in such a rain as this?"

Aileen glanced from her niece to the square outside, a grey and sodden square filled with market booths roofed in with every species of improvised curtain known to the thrifty mind. Then she glanced down at her pale-grey lap.

"I really had n't thought of going out, Molly."

Molly nodded her *finale* to the waiter, standing at attention at her elbow.

"You will, when you've had your second cup of coffee," she replied. "You know that always makes a difference."

"But in the rain?" Aileen protested.

Molly shrugged her shoulders, while she broke her roll.

"Your motor clothes are used to being wet," she said relentlessly.

"We can watch it all from the drawing-room window. We actually can see more of the market, looking down on it, than we can when we're on the level and in the very midst of things."

Molly deluged her butter with salt; then she spread the resultant mixture on her roll. When at last she spoke, her mouth was a bit too full for perfect manners or for dainty utterance.

"Poor Auntie Aileen! You're nothing but a thing of vanity, after all. For my part, as soon as I finish breakfast, I am going to put on my big boots, and sally forth. I want to buy things, and I want to have adventures."

"But, Molly —"

Airily Molly shook her golden head.

"Oh, it's all right, Auntie Aileen. I promise I won't go outside the Place and you can take an opera glass to the drawing-room, and chaperon me from the window. Anyway, I would n't do anything very desperate; your passport is n't guaranteed to hold an extra fare."

In the end, however, Aileen yielded and went, too. This was not from any latent distrust of Molly, though; but because Aileen's own enthusiasm refused to lie stagnant beside the rushing stream of Molly's ardour. The second cup of coffee did its share; the unsatisfactory view out of the drawing-room windows added; and the final touch was given by curiosity, not only as to what was happening behind the flapping curtains of the booths, but as to what was about to happen on the wooden stadium

in process of erection against the brown face of the aged Halles. Moreover, the rain benevolently slackened just a very little, and just at the very instant that Molly was finishing her fourth and final roll. Accordingly, fifteen minutes later, Marie was astounded to hear her mistress demanding her motor costume and her stoutest boots.

Once abroad and in the market place, it was impossible to think about the rain, or to remember the reasonable processes concerned in trying to keep dry. How could one keep dry, indeed, dodging in and out of the long rows and ranks and concentric circles of tent-like structures, whose roofs leaked rivulets down one's neck, whose floors were miniature lakes, whose inhabitants dripped water from every angle of their persons and accoutrements? And how could one think about mere rain, the sort of thing that one could meet any day and in any country, when, instead, one could revel in such interesting wares as skeins of homespun yarns and hanks of home-filled sausages, in tinselled picture postcards and portraits of the Virgin, in sabots plain, and sabots decorated in rusty black paint, in edibles and drinkables and wearables known only to the Flemish peasant mind?

Molly lingered longest in the sabot booths.

"It's like a potential orchestra," she insisted to Aileen, who sought to lure her onward into dryer quarters. "I've the lilt of them in my system, the tinkle of the baby ones and the clatter of the grown-up ones, on these cobbles. Look at these wee, wee ones, Auntie Aileen, and imagine the soft little feet inside them! Poor wee piggies!" And, young as

was Molly, her voice was all crooning with the real mother love ingrained in womankind.

And then, —

“Hullo, Miss Warburton! Well, well! Well, I am blessed, if it is n’t good to run across you,” came a jovial hail from over Molly’s shoulder.

Heedless of her manners, Molly whirled about. It was astounding to hear an English salutation in this Flemish babble; it was still more astounding to find her finical Aunt Aileen the object of this strident greeting.

Aileen had looked up, too, colouring sharply, as one is bound to colour when she hears her name shouted in a stranger crowd. Then the vexation left her face; and, to Molly’s further astonishment, she smiled cordially into the bluff and snub-nosed countenance of the man who had paused before her with an outstretched hand.

“Mr. Price!”

“The very same. And mighty glad to see you. Here’s Mrs. Price.” And he detached a feminine counterpart from rapt inspection of the heaped-up sabots. “Well, how do you do? Have you played any more shuffleboard, since we came ashore?”

In mercy to Molly’s bursting curiosity, Aileen took advantage of a momentary pause for breath, to perform certain introductions. Molly’s eyes were dancing, as she acknowledged the hearty greetings of the bedraggled and contented pair; but she discreetly lowered her lashes and answered Price with a brevity which he set down as shyness, not an amicable effort to suppress her mirth. His duty done by Molly, he turned back to Aileen, whom

plainly he regarded as swimming in a loftier æther than the one allotted to the orbit of himself and his honest, ungroomed wife.

"Yes," he went on alertly; "we're doing Belgium now. We went through England and Scotland and across through Denmark and Germany and Switzerland, and so back to Paris. Not so bad for seven weeks, eh? We've seen a lot, and we mean to see a whole lot more. Of course, we get things mixed up a good deal; but Mrs. Price is a wonder. She's hit on the plan of buying postcards, first thing when we get inside a place, all the different postcards she can find. She numbers them on the back to match the pages in Baedeker, and she dates them, and there you are. We must have thousands. When we get home — But where have you been, since we came ashore?"

"In England, with just a few days in Paris," Aileen told him, with a sudden sense of shame, as she thought of his probable opinion of her neglected opportunities.

But Price, as always, showed his tolerance.

"Well, I suppose you are staying on, a little longer than we can do. I promised my side partner — not Mrs. Price here, but the other one who helps me run my store — I promised him I'd be back in season to start the holiday rush. That means half our time is gone; and we've Spain and Italy and Algiers ahead. They tell me we really ought to have three days for Florence and a week for Rome; but I am hoping we can manage on a little less, for we missed out on Holland and have had to come back. By the way!" And Price brought himself up short.

"Yes?"

"You remember Stanway, that beakish fellow in the mourning clothes? They said on the *Beatic* that he was a widower; but my wife said he did n't act like one, or else, he did. You knew him? Why, he sat at your table."

Aileen's smile never wavered. Molly, however, apparently was strangling.

"I remember Mr. Stanway perfectly," Aileen said quietly. "What about him?"

"Saw him in Paris, yesterday. Strange how one runs across the same people everywhere: Stanway yesterday, and you to-day."

"Was Mr. Stanway well?" Aileen inquired.

Price's snub-nosed countenance betrayed a certain discomfiture.

"I could n't say," he blurted out, with characteristic honesty. "He was very near us, waiting for a cab in the *Place du Carrousel*," Price's pronunciation seemed to indicate that the famous square was a constant scene of riotings unspeakable; "and I called to him, but I could n't seem to make him hear. Before I could get over to him, he had hopped into a cab. I saw Winterbourne, too."

"In Paris?" And now Molly pricked up her ears.

Price turned to smile at her benignly.

"You know him, too?"

"A little."

"Good fellow!" Price observed, and Molly had an instant of wondering whether the phrase was levelled at Winterbourne or herself. Then, from the context, she decided on the former application. "Yes, I met him in London, in Regent Street just

in front of that round yellow block where the big jewellery store is. He was as cordial as could be, introduced me to the man with him, and they quite insisted I should have lunch with them at their club."

"And you did?"

Price shook his head, with manifest regret.

"Could n't spare time. It was our last day in London; we had done the West End, and were working east as fast as we could, to get to the Tower before closing time. It would have upset all of our plans, if I'd gone back to lunch; and yet," Price added, with renewed regret; "they all tell me the inside of some of those Piccadilly clubs is worth the seeing; not so showy as ours, perhaps, but any amount more comfortable."

"You may have another invitation," Molly suggested consolingly.

"No chance. We're only stopping in London over night, on our way back to Liverpool. That's the worst of such a trip as this: so many things have to be left out." Price snatched at his watch. "Well, Miss Warburton, here's one of them now. We'd like to stop and talk, all day; but we must be getting on. We have n't half seen Bruges."

"When did you come?"

"This morning, early; we're going on to Ghent, to-night. They say we ought to give three days to Brussels, and another two to Antwerp. I tell you, it does walk into the time, does n't it? Well, we must go. So long!"

And Molly, with absolute demureness, echoed, —

"So long!" Then, once his wide and creasy back had vanished in the crowd, she turned to face

her aunt. "Who is the darling, Auntie Aileen? Your annals of the *Beatic* have n't included him."

Aileen explained. At the end of her explanation, —

"And, to save my life, I could n't snub the man," she added, in apology.

"Snub him! It would have been a crime. But fancy gulping down the whole of Europe in ten weeks! It makes you dizzy, dizziest of all when you think of sorting out the postcards." And then, after an instant, she made one of her apparently inconsequent digressions. "But it was nice of Mr. Winterbourne," she said.

And Aileen nodded. Nodding, she forebore to comment on the possible scene in the Place du Carrousel.

Nor, in the end, was that the sole adventure of that memorable rainy day, memorable to those who walked the streets of the Netherlands; far, far more memorable to those afloat on the surly waters of the North Sea and to their sorrowing, land-abiding kin. The daylight came in, escorted by a pelting shower, the first of an all-morning series. The daylight waned and vanished, borne out into the darkness on a tempest the like of which never had ravaged those low coasts before, a tempest which strewed the land with down-flung trees, which strewed the sea with wreckage of many and many a ship.

Just before the storm broke in its full fury, Aileen decided that they must go out for chocolate and to assure themselves that the dog did not forget his English vocabulary. Molly, nothing loath, assented. Indeed, they both of them had wearied of the forced inaction of the afternoon. In such a place as Bruges,

novels and letters and embroidery are wholly out of keeping; three hours had been long enough for the experiment. It was with a sense of intensest exhilaration, with intensest longing for adventures yet to come, that Aileen, with Molly at her side, stepped out once more into the mist and rain.

Even by that time, the storm was rising. It took tact and judgment to coax one's umbrella into good behaviour, while one crossed the Gran' Place. Once around the corner, though, in the *Rue des Pierres*, it was possible to walk more steadily. None the less, Aileen and Molly were well winded, by the time they reached the shop, glad to rest a little, before they demanded chocolate and the society of the dog. Moreover, it was very good to loiter there in shelter, feeding the dog brioche, chattering to the mistress of the shop, watching the rush of rain go slashing and sluicing down across the street, and listening to the rising *vibrato* of the storm. At last, though, shop-born hospitality could be taxed no longer, and Aileen rose to go.

"Come, Molly. It is getting dark. Are you ready? No, puppy; you must stop inside." And, with a nod, they shut the door behind them.

Out in the street, the storm was boisterous, violent. It faced them, every way they turned. It buffeted them with driving sheets of water; it knocked them against each other, against posts, against the walls of houses. The air roared and hummed with the fierce clamour of the storm. And then, above the storm, drowned to a futile tinkle, came the deep bell of the cathedral, just across the bit of open square.

Aileen lifted the edge of her straining, snapping umbrella. Before her, the cathedral windows were alight.

"In there!" she gasped to Molly, just behind. "We'll stay till after service, anyway. It's impossible to get home across the Place, till the wind —"

What the wind had to do with it, was inaudible to Molly, nor did she care. Even her young body began to feel the imperative need for shelter. At Aileen's side, she bent herself to face the storm, more violent now with every minute. Twice they struggled forward towards the door of the cathedral; twice they were driven back again into the shelter of the building they had but just abandoned. Then, mustering all their strength, they made a third attempt, set out at full speed, were caught and whirled in a whirling eddy of the gale, then were swept forward sharply towards the cathedral door, swept forward into violent contact with an unknown pedestrian who was struggling out of the angle from the *Rue du Sablon*, and making for the same refuge as themselves.

Too breathless to offer an apology, he did the one thing obvious. He opened the cathedral door and stepped aside to let them pass in ahead of him. As he did so, the light struck full into his face, full across his hair of ashy-grey. An instant afterwards, there came two exclamations, one *sotto voce*, and one quite audible.

It was Molly who spoke first, and in an accent which she fondly judged too low to be overheard by any but Aileen.

"Oh, Auntie Aileen, it's my tourist!"

And, in the same breath, Aileen said swiftly, —

“Mr. Clode! Can this really be you?”

Afterwards, though, alone in her own room, Aileen hoped that her voice had not been quite so joyful as its echo sounded in her ears.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

NOTWITHSTANDING the depressing drizzle, Bruges found itself *en fête*, next morning. Over night, all signs of the Saturday market had disappeared. In its place, by way of centre of attraction, there rose the temporary wooden stadium, rank on rank of seats built up against the northern façade of the brown old Halles. The seats were for the singers, five hundred of them; the level platform in front was for the musicians of the band and for the small army of priests who were to celebrate the dedicatory mass for the restored Madonna in the wall above, the Madonna-Guardian of the town of many bridges. And, just as the Saturday market brought in the dwellers from all the country round about, so this Sunday act of consecration of their guardian's new splendour brought them back once more, not to bargain, this time, but to pray.

Breakfast time found the Place already beginning to be thronged with the curious, who clustered in buzzing knots of humanity, discussing the plans for the Celebration and the outlook for the weather, staring at the workmen on the stadium, still busy backing and covering the timber work with greens. Others, in twos and threes, were trudging up and down, inspecting, gathering information, offering advice, according to their individual natures. Now and then a sudden scud of rain brought up the

umbrellas, or sent a little army scurrying to shelter, their long cloaks flying in the wind, and their wooden sabots clanking merrily upon the cobbles as they ran. The next lightening of the clouds, however, brought them all back again, always with some new recruits, far too agog with curiosity to think of wasting time upon the earlier masses in the churches.

Aileen had taken it quite simply and as a matter of course that Clode should come to breakfast at the Rose d'Argent, next morning; and, later, that he should watch the spectacle with them from the windows of the drawing-room above. Clode, nothing loath, had consented. The Rose d'Argent had heretofore escaped his notice; but he had taken on trust the enthusiasms of Molly and the stiller sort of praises spoken by Aileen. Certainly, its view of the function would be unexceptionable. Moreover, it would give him opportunity for conversation with Aileen.

Clode had been waiting for this opportunity patiently and for many weeks. What was more, despite his outward patience which had been most exemplary, his eyes betrayed the fact that the waiting had told on him more than a little. Indeed, Clode's European trip had not been proving exactly the restful thing which his advisers had planned for him. This was not the advisers' fault, however; but merely the fault of circumstance which had ordained that, in the first week of his holiday, Clode should come face to face with conditions which heretofore had not existed in his life.

Carl Clode had set sail from New York, a little tired, perhaps, a little bored by a surfeit of attention;

but totally convinced that his life, as he had elected to arrange its personal details, was perfect and entire, that it lacked nothing. Midway across the salt Atlantic, he had begun to question. The questions had grown to mammoth doubts, long before he had reached Holyhead, doubts which he had set before Aileen, their cause and likewise their subject, with uncompromising plainness.

It was a new experience to Clode to have his desires and doubts prove unavailing. He had begun his talk with Aileen, in the mood of plain Carl Clode. Aileen proving far less plastic than he had expected, bit by bit he had added the P. J. to his manner, until his final proclamation to her had smacked a little of more than one of his acutest business deals. Indeed, in thinking backward over their talk on the top deck, that sunny morning, Clode realized that he might have been slightly unconventional. It was not precisely a normal form of proposal: the rolling up his heart into a bundle and casting it down at the feet of the adored one, telling her she could pick it up, when and as she chose. Convention apart, though, Clode rather approved of this, the unpremeditated method of his wooing. He was a shrewd judge of humanity. He had followed the same course, time and time again, with men in business deals. In some respects, Aileen was curiously like a man, like one in her judgment, and in her absence of hysteria. He felt assured that, in the end, her superlative common sense would bring her to see the honest sincerity of his purpose, the ingrained chivalry which had dictated the form of its expression.

Moreover, the ship and Aileen behind him, he was aware of an increasing desire to see the girl again. He longed to tally her up, as viewed against two unlike backgrounds; longed to watch her, apart from the glamour of the sea, outside of the No-man's-land of shipboard, away from the kite-like tail of Griegs and Stanways, of British Winterbournes and Sedalia Prices, of blond deck stewards and red-headed Tommy Owensens who had gone trailing after her from peak to taffrail. It was not that he doubted her charm — exactly. It was not that he doubted her being the one woman in the world for him. It was only that the piling up of intervening weeks and miles had made him conscious of a restless wondering just how long it would be possible for any woman to maintain a dominating influence upon his life.

Up to the hour of the *Beatic's* sailing from New York, women had been an inconspicuous item in Clode's plans for life. One had to take them out to dinner; one had to dance with them occasionally; still more occasionally one had to have his opera spoiled for him by the need of listening to their chatter. And the chatter rarely, in these latter days, had strayed far from Clode's personal equation. From sheer persistent iteration, it had become distinctly boring. Life, too, in these latter years, had broadened along all sorts of unexpected tangents. With modern inventions at one's back, with modern industrial organization in one's hands, the opportunities for opening out one's chances were practically unlimited. Only, it took all of one's personality, keyed to its highest tension, to play out the game. Briefly, then, and putting all the ele-

ments together, Clode, asked on the morning he had left New York, would have made unhesitating answer that he had neither time nor wish for marriage.

Indeed, in this his position had not been so unlike that of Aileen herself. Life, full-handed, stood before him. Having virtually all things awaiting him, he could not fail to realize that any change of destiny might bring only so much loss. At best, it would be changing certainty for risk. At worst,—

However, Aileen refused to be associated with such a phrase as *at worst*. Two days in her society had gone far to convince Clode that some risks were worth the taking. Two more days and then two more had blinded him to any possibility of loss at all. But now separation had come in to play its part. It in no way lessened Clode's longing for Aileen's society, no way decreased his wish to win and hold her for his wife, no way heightened the colour of his belief that Aileen Warburton was the one woman in the world for him.

Nevertheless, in the reaction born of the change from idling on shipboard to stepping out again into the busy traffic of the great world centres, a new element had come into Clode's attitude to Aileen, one disconcerting and far, far less selfish than any he had known before. Of his desire to woo and win her, he felt not the slightest question. But he did question deeply, shrewdly, the permanence of her hold on him, the length and breadth and, above all, the depth of it. Now, as he had proved past all gainsaying during those idle hours on the *Beatic's* boat deck, she could enter fully into the interests, the vitalities, of his experience. But, Aileen won

in perpetuity and their honeymoon once ended, would he weary of her, accept her as a pretty and a charming plaything, relegate her absolutely to the care-free places of his life, shutting the gates between her and the experiences which were destined to form his later manhood? It was all most women asked, all that most men cared to give. It was by no means all, though, that he, Carl Clode, had it in his power to give. Therefore, would there not be an edge of dishonour, more than an edge of selfishness, in asking all from Aileen, and giving her but a moiety in return? Clode's manhood drew back, disgusted, at the question.

Moreover, he asked himself a trifle mercilessly, was it possible for a man to annul the theories born of forty years' experience of life and what it offered, to disprove them all in scarce four times forty hours? Rather, was not his love for Aileen a passing phase, a shipboard madness which would vanish in the sober realities of land? And, if it did, what then? Earlier, he would have answered the question without scruple, answered it in the old, conventional way, the way which leads through all the gamut of racked nerves and dulling conscience and ends, too often, in the *nisi* of the courts. Now, though, his talk with Aileen concerning Bernie Lennox and the girl had cleared his moral vision. Better to confess one's self in error at the start, than later on, after things became too irrevocable. Aileen had had the supreme courage — for now, in his widening, clearing vision, Clode called it by its proper name — the supreme courage to explain to Bernie Lennox that she had made a bad mistake when she, a girl, had reckoned

him, a boy, the Galahad of her young dreams. Just in the same way, he ought to have the courage for a like confession, if he had been mistaken in believing her to be the dominating influence, the moral compass of which his self-centred life had felt no need till then.

But how was he to find this out? How did one find out such things, anyway? By analysis? By intuition? And how could any man safely be analytic or intuitive in any connection so elusive as was the conduct of his future?

It was no small wonder, then, that Clode's keen eyes looked weary; no small wonder that the weeks since he had left the *Beatic* had taken it out of him, as the phrase is, far more badly than any dozen of the business deals which had caused him, in his search for rest, to drop the P. J. from his name. His wanderings had not absorbed him in the least. Dutifully he had visited the English lakes and Devon, had been profoundly bored in Paris, profoundly amused by London and the pontifical solemnity with which it faces all things from its Punch and Judy to its suffragettes.

At the back of his head had lain a private memorandum that October would mean Flanders to him; and a hint from Winterbourne, whom he had met, one day, in Piccadilly, had sent him first of all to Bruges. The town had charmed him, from the hour of his arrival. Its parti-coloured walls, its grey old bridges had lured him out of all his cares and doubtings, all his questionings. His odd little bit of hymn, so strangely uncharacteristic of the man he was supposed to be: the little theme was often on his lips,

in those bright October days when he had loitered on the quays, and leaned upon the low-arched bridges, waiting for the hour when Aileen would come to Bruges and find him there ahead of her.

The same little theme had been on his lips, indeed, that stormy night when, seeking shelter in Saint Sauveur, he had stepped aside to allow a wind-blown woman to pass in before him and, stepping, had found himself, without an instant's warning, face to face with the woman who, nowadays, was the core and pith of all his thoughts, all his desires, yes, and all, all of his questions.

In that moment, Carl Clode knew, once for all, that questionings had ceased for ever, that doubtings had been wholly groundless. Aileen, wind-buffeted and breathless, her dripping toque awry, her yellow hair tossed into rings about her eager face, was not to him the longed-for complement of his own life. Rather, she was that life itself. He longed to take her in his arms, to crush her to him, to refuse to let her go again, ever again. Instead, he pulled himself back to the consciousness of their compact, and of Molly, and of the fact that a chilly stone porch on a stormy autumn night was not fit setting for a scene of mediæval sentiment. Accordingly, he crammed his rising madness into a case of twentieth-century New York convention, and inquired, with a laudable attempt to sound quite casual, —

“Miss Warburton, what good wind blew you here?”

However, not all the twentieth-century New York conventions in the world could keep him from shutting his two strong hands over Aileen's hand, un-

brella and all, shutting them and quite forgetting to let them fall away again at the expiry of the proper time.

It was Molly who finally brought the conversation back to the normal mood once more. She did it with a practical question.

"Well, why did n't you look us up?" she asked him.

"How did I know you were here?" Clode parried.

"You said you had seen Mr. Winterbourne," Molly suggested, with a suspicion of a blush.

"Not for a month."

"Oh!" Molly appeared a little better satisfied, though for what reason Aileen could not fathom.

"He told me he was to meet you on a motoring trip; and that you were going to Brussels afterwards, or else to Antwerp."

"Good boy!" Molly's comment appeared to be as enigmatic as had been her blush. Then, dismissing enigma, she yielded to frank curiosity. "Then would you mind telling us why you came here, Mr. Clode?" she asked him.

His firm lips broke into a smile, partly in sympathy with her irresponsible girlishness, partly in satisfaction at his own acumen.

"Because he told me you'd be sure to come here, one way or the other. Brussels was too large a hunting ground; and so was Antwerp; I knew I could n't miss you here."

"Apparently you could. For the past two days, I have been calling you The Tourist, in large capitals, because you appeared to be the only one in sight. At least, you were till Mr. Price came along."

"Price?" And Clode looked so mystified that Aileen came to his relief.

"Surely you remember the good, Newfoundland puppy of a man from Sedalia who taught me shuffle-board."

Clode laughed.

"Of course. Has he been here? And his amorphous wife?"

"I don't know," Molly spoke thoughtfully; "that you really and accurately could say they've been here. They cometed across the market, this morning, on their way from Rome to Amsterdam."

"But how long have you been here?" Clode asked.

Swiftly Molly counted on her fingers.

"Two, three days. Or is it four, Auntie Aileen? I can't just be sure."

"Then why have n't I seen you?"

And Molly answered irrepressibly,—

"Probably because we were n't there, exactly on the minute."

"But you are at the hotel?" he urged his investigations, and he named the house most favoured by prosperous Cook tourists.

"Ours discounts that entirely; does n't it, Auntie Aileen?"

Then Aileen spoke with sweet, grave dignity, for Molly's chaff had given her time to regain the self-mastery from which she had been jarred.

"Anyway, Molly, we love it; and that is the main thing. Perhaps, if Mr. Clode will come to breakfast with us, in the morning, we can convince him of its charm." And, in the accent which she contrived

to give the phrase, it became, not an invitation, but something very like command.

"Thank you," Clode said simply.

"At half-past nine, then? We shall look for you, and hope it may be clear enough so that we can eat outside. Come, Molly. It has stopped raining. Shall we go?"

"May I — ?" Then Clode hesitated. He read, and interpreted, Aileen's desire to be alone. Moreover, to no small degree, he shared it.

"Thank you; but really there's no need. It has been so good to meet you, though. Good-bye until to-morrow morning." And, an instant afterward, the massive door swung to behind her.

Clode, splashing homeward through the puddles, had an abiding notion he was skimming above the clouds. Moreover, neither he nor Aileen slept too much, that night.

Nevertheless, they met at breakfast with an air of casual detachment supposed to mislead Molly utterly. In their secret hearts, they both of them rather stood in awe of Molly for the moment; her extreme youth rendered her so much more keensighted as concerned their nascent idyll. Moreover, as they both of them were sneakingly aware, the earlier twenties finds thirty-plus increasingly ridiculous just in proportion as it allows itself to become idyllic. Wherefore, by way of throwing Molly off the scent, their breakfast conversation smacked of Price's methods, so brusque and bluff was it in its *camaraderie*.

Molly, however, was too keen to be misled in the least. Even without the comments of Winterbourne,

she would have scented elderly romance in this meeting. Not for nothing did a busy business man settle himself in a bit of a place like Bruges and, fists in his pockets, loaf up and down the stone-parapeted quays, on the off chance of meeting an occasional acquaintance. Not for nothing did Auntie Aileen, the unshakable, lose her self-poised, smiling calm, and turn to the momentary likeness of a blushing, stammering girl in her early 'teens. Molly always had loved fairy tales. Now she told herself a new one, and revelled in the telling. The only trouble with it lay in her sense of humour, which balked at the three decades of the heroine, balked at the hero's ash-grey head.

"Poor little dears!" Molly said to herself indulgently. "And the funniest thing about it all is that they have n't the faintest notion what is happening."

In the which, Molly was mistaken. They both were well aware just what was happening; or, rather, what already had happened. Clode took the knowledge with serenity; Aileen, with divers kickings at the pricks.

Meanwhile, Molly, revelling in what she deemed her riper knowledge, was amusing herself by playing a part in faithful imitation of the recent Miss Ryerson. Not that she did anything really overt, anything to which Aileen, plainly a trifle on her nerves, could take exception. Molly was far too wily for that, far too experienced a tease. She merely showed a bright absorption in their mutual pleasure in the meeting, a kindly helpfulness in filling up the pauses of the talk, a sprightly eagerness in planning for

the later hours of the day, hours when, she explained to them with punctilious care, she would be busy writing letters, and so relieved that Auntie Aileen had somebody in reach to keep her from feeling bored.

And then, breakfast over and the Berlin-wool art collection of the drawing-room inspected, Molly ostentatiously departed on an errand. To Clode's surprise and no small amusement, what was more, she failed to reappear.

So it came about that, just the two of them and side by side, Clode and Aileen sat in the wide, deep-seated window, talking fitfully, but for the most part silent, gazing out upon the Gran' Place, watching the sacred pageant unrolling before their eyes. The Place was close-packed by now. Only in the bit of space behind the monument could one catch a glimpse of cobbles. Gold lace and silver jostled shabby fustians; scarlet stripes and orange facings mingled with white muslin caps and long black hooded cloaks. One by one, the hundreds of singers had mounted to their places on the green-backed benches, beneath the restored medallion of the Madonna overhead. Then had come the sound of martial trumpetings, subdued to a proper note of devoutness, yet still strident, rhythmic, thrilling. A moment afterwards, out of the narrow entrance of the *Rue des Pierres* came the procession, bands first, then the green-robed bishops, bearing the Host, then priests on priests on priests.

The serried crowd swayed forward, eager, anticipant, anxious to see and hear. But, in the open space of cobbles behind the monument, a dozen little boys never once halted in their frolic; the *staccato*

clacking of their wooden sabots beat out a theme that intermingled curiously with the steady, sonorous braying of the bands, now busy with the opening phrases of the *Introit*.

The Mass went its way, the reverence-compelling way of all masses. And the little boys' game went its way, the way of healthy, incurious childhood, the world over. And Clode and Aileen, now looking and listening in perfect silence, went their way also, a way of dreams and visions.

Then, without warning, the bands changed their theme, and shrilled out strongly, cheerily. Mass was over; the procession formed anew, this time with all the singers in its train. The bands swung into a rhythmic recessional, and the long line moved off, musician and bishop, priest and soldier, into the narrow throat of the Rue des Pierres and so back to the cathedral and the churches whence they came. While they were marching homewards, while the blaring of the bands was growing weaker with the distance, down from the lofty Belfry overhead came the repeated, insistent, booming note of its deepest bell, marking the rhythm of the recessional, reminding them all, bandsmen and priests and reverent crowd of onlookers, that the Belfry was the focus of it all. Then the band faded into silence, a silence broken only by the deep, persistent booming of the bell. This lasted for minutes, lasted until even the stoutest nerves were quivering in answer to the call; and then, softly, daintily, the little, little bells of the upper octaves took up the theme of the recessional, played it, repeated it, played with it, tossed it down to other octaves who played with it and

tossed it back again, till all the octaves came together in one vast unison of melody against the one great bell which boomed and brayed persistently, a veritable organ-point of sound.

And, all the time, down on the open space of cobbles, the little boys kept up their playing, and the little tinkling tune of their wooden sabots embroidered its delicate tracery against the giant harmonies sweeping down from overhead.

The unison was ended; a scud of rain sent the little boys to shelter. Clode turned to speak to Aileen. To his intense surprise, the tears were hanging on her yellow lashes, and her hand, lifted nervously, besought him to keep silence.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

At luncheon time, Molly reappeared and once more took up her self-elected rôle of Lovers' Providence.

"Such a wonderful morning!" she explained breathlessly, as she shook the raindrops from her hat and hair.

"Where have you been, child?" Aileen asked, in belated anxiety.

Molly laughed blithely. Her instincts and her own small experience were alike assuring her, that, all that morning long, Miss Aileen Warburton had been quite unaware that she even owned a niece.

"Parading up and down under your windows, Auntie Aileen, and pitying you poor stay-ins for all that you were losing. It was so much more thrilling, down there in the Place; really, I felt a part of it, as if I belonged, not as if it were a show made up for my entertainment."

"What about the letters, Miss Molly?" Clode reminded her.

She raised her eyes full to meet his own, and, in their honest depths, she read his liking for her wayward, teasing self. Her glance returned the liking, with good interest.

"Still all ahead of me, Mr. Clode," she told him saucily. "That's the penalty you pay for yielding to temptation. And I could n't be expected to

lose a sight like that, just for the sake of explaining to people that I am well and happy, complicated with five cents' worth of excerpts from Baedeker. This afternoon, I'll have a go at it, while you and Auntie Aileen are getting talked out."

"How do you know we have n't arrived at that stage already?" Clode demanded, and Aileen, listening, pricked up her ears and stared in surprise, for it was a new Clode who was speaking, a boyish Clode and full of teasing mirth.

Molly was ready for him, though.

"Because I have been watching you," she told him promptly. "I kept the corner of my eye on you, most of the morning, and you did n't exchange a dozen words an hour. With all of the *Beatic* back of you, to say nothing of the vagaries of that adorable Mr. Price, you must have crowds of things to say. Moreover, if I were there, you would n't half say them properly, for fear I'd get bored. A half-gossip is infinitely worse than none at all. Now do let's come down and have our luncheon. It is long past time."

Clode looked about him for his hat; but Molly forestalled the natural consequences of the gesture.

"No; that's not a hint, Mr. Clode. You'd best stay here for luncheon. It is my one chance to see you, if we go, to-morrow, and I stay busy, all the afternoon. Besides, how can you recommend Madame's nephew's cookery, unless you have something a little more critical than coffee and rolls?"

This time, Aileen felt it her duty to interfere. Molly was becoming a bit too officious, it seemed to her, a bit too self-assertive in fashioning plans

for her elders, especially for a man like Clode who usually took it on himself to reconstruct the plans of other people. Indeed, remembering certain of Clode's more masterful hours on shipboard, Aileen had looked up at Clode a little anxiously, while Molly had been speaking. To her immense relief, she had found Clode seemingly not in the least put out by the girl's astounding frankness. Rather, he had bestowed on her an amused attention akin to that with which an ancient and wise wolfhound watches a frivolous kitten. Like the hound, Clode knew that, on occasion, kittens showed their claws, knew also that, for the moment, this particular kitten's claws were hidden in her soft and patting paws. And then, an instant afterward, Aileen wondered whether she was quite fair to Molly in believing that, upon occasion, she could really scratch at all. Up to the present hour of their being together, Molly had never given the slightest indication of possessing claws.

However, —

"Perhaps, Molly, Mr. Clode has something else on hand," she warned her niece.

Molly swiftly recognized the accent. It pertained to the days and methods of Miss Ryerson, and it implied that she was very, very young. Clode saw her rising colour, and swiftly intervened.

"Inasmuch as I have been hanging about here for a week, on the chance of meeting you," he told them coolly; "it stands to reason that now I mean to see all of you that I can. Is it irrevocable that you go on, to-morrow?"

"Molly is anxious to get to Brussels," Aileen said.

"Then," Clode spoke quietly; "the only thing for me is to get all the good out of to-day that I can, Miss Molly. Therefore I'll stay to luncheon."

His words were addressed to Molly; but, as he spoke them, his eyes were on Aileen. Moreover, burning in their steady depths, there was a sombre glow which stiffened Molly into a resolution that they would not depart to Brussels on the morrow, not if she had to break a leg or two in her efforts to prevent it. Once again she raised her eyes to Clode. In his clean-cut, determined face, she read a resolution similar to her own, a resolution which, she felt assured, he would accomplish without recourse to any such violent measures as she herself had planned.

However, keeping their combined resolutions secret from each other, they ate their luncheon, and they went their ways: Molly to her letters, Clode, as he had phrased it, to get all the good out of the day that he was able.

It was not until the two of them, however, himself and Aileen, were loitering along the *Quai Vert* that Clode, for the once, broke in upon his customary reticence as concerned himself.

"I sometimes think," he said abruptly, his eyes upon the pink and creamy tiles mirrored in the still canal; "that it's a distinct loss never to have learned to play."

"But you do know how," Aileen assured him, in some haste, for she felt a feminine wish to modify the sadness in his voice.

"Not properly. Not as a man should do. I've never had the time to learn."

"Some people take to it naturally, without any learning," she suggested.

He nodded.

"Now and then there's one; your niece, for instance. Still, they are n't too common. And, as for me —"

Instead of speaking her desire to have him finish out his phrase, Aileen took a more persuasive method of expression. Stopping short, she clasped her arms on the low parapet, and stood there, silent, waiting.

It took a little time, however, for Clode to down his usual reluctance to talk about himself. At last, he managed it.

"I was such a small boy, when I was left to myself; no brothers and sisters and no mother, and my invalid father just dead. He left me to a Puritanic old bachelor as guardian, a man whose soul was tied up in a canvas money-bag, whose home life was summed up in a housekeeper fully as dour as he was, himself. I was put through school and college; but my holidays I spent with them, imbibing their atmosphere and accepting their work-a-day standards because I never had had much chance to learn any other."

"But in school?" Aileen suggested, her eyes upon the troubled face beside her.

Clode smiled, not at her, but at her reflection in the water.

"He chose his school with care. It was no proper place to put a growing boy. Our brains were sharpened with all sorts of mental files and chisels; but all such little things as affection and the sheer puppy happiness that goes with boyhood: these were knocked

out of us, and ambition was hammered in to take their place. We never heard one-tenth as much about the Sermon on the Mount as we did of the personal creed of Napoleon. This was only in school, of course; but, by the time I was in college — my father's will had decided that — the mischief was done. It was too late to undo it."

Aileen spoke impulsively.

"But, with a different training, would you ever have done all that you have accomplished, as it is?"

He let his lean brown hands fall on the coping of the parapet. The gesture emphasized to the full his sense of his own futility.

"What have I done, Miss Warburton?"

"Most people would be asking what you have n't, Mr. Clode."

He shut his hands on the edge of the coping.

"I'm too old to be fishing compliments, Miss Warburton," he said, with sudden curtness. "Of course, I've made a certain outward record, fitted together the cogs of a business, managed a few hundred men without having an immoderate number of strikes upon my hands. But anybody can do as much as that, if he puts his entire vitality into it, as I have done. In the literal sense, devoid of any sentiment, I've given my life to my ambitions. Now, at forty, all at once I have waked up to ask the question whether it has been worth the while."

"Yes, it has," she told him fearlessly.

"But think of all the points where I've missed out," he urged her.

"Only up to now. You've time enough, ahead

of you. No matter what one tries for, one has to concentrate at first, to gain a foothold. After, he can broaden out. Your life is still ahead of you, and in your hands."

So earnestly had Aileen spoken, so out of the heart of her own life-creed, that she had not heeded in the least whither her words were tending. She was startled, then, when Clode turned to face her, his lips not quite so firm as usual, but his clear eyes alight.

"No," he corrected her gravely. "It is in yours."

For an instant, Aileen whitened. Then she rallied swiftly. It still would take her a little time to learn her lesson: that, under Clode's quiet surface, the tides of his nature surged as strongly as did the blue waves beneath the *Beatic's* keel; that, like the displaced waves behind the keel, they answered to their own laws of ebb and flow, regardless of her puny, woman's efforts to stay them in their course. In the months and years to come, Aileen Warburton was destined to learn her lesson in its entirety. For the present, though, her eyes only made out a few beginning letters of its initial chapter. Even those filled her with some fear, so emphatic were they in their import, so decisive. She rallied swiftly; but she drew back.

"Of course, the kind of thing you've done is bound to take a good deal of concentration," she said lightly. "As a rule, one does n't blunder merrily into a dominating place in the business world. But, as I say, you've time enough ahead of you, to broaden out in almost any line you choose, even —" and, facing him, she forced the smile back into her grey

eyes; "even to the point of learning to romp gracefully."

But he refused to answer to the challenge of her eyes and accent. Instead he shook his head.

"My moral muscles are too stiff, Miss Warburton." And then he added quite abruptly, "I wonder if you've any idea how lonely a life I've really spent."

She dropped her efforts at blitheness.

"But of your own choice, Mr. Clode."

"No; of circumstance, and the yielding to one besetting aim. I never had a brother, nor any cousins at all near my age, to start me in the habit of needing other youngsters. In college, I had a few good chums. Since then, though, I have lost sight of most of them. However," his face, once more turned to the brown waters of the canal, was reflected sharply back to Aileen's watching eyes, and now she saw it lighten, brighten marvellously; "all these latter years, I have had one good friend."

"Tell me about him," she begged quickly.

Clode lifted his eyes from the water and fixed them upon her, thoughtfully, unseeingly.

"It's not the sort of thing to tell; the things one really lives out never make much of a story. He's a bit of an artist, a bit of a musician, a bit of a dreamer. Besides that, perhaps on account of that, he also is one of the most brilliant designing engineers in the States. Docks are his specialty. Next to those, he loves Brahms and his pipes. We've roomed together for ten years; we began it, when we literally shared one room. Now that we can have all the fleshpots for which we hanker, we've increased

our quarters to the limits of a modern apartment. It was for decency's sake, though, to impress upon the world at large that we were n't stingy; not because we felt any need to get any further apart. In fact," Clode's laugh was slightly shamefaced; "up to the time I came away from home, we had n't spent seven evenings apart in as many years. It was n't that we were getting into too deep a rut, either. We liked to do any number of different things; but, as a rule, we preferred doing them together to doing them apart." Something of the boyishness Aileen had noticed earlier, in his talk with Molly, came back to Clode, while he made his long explanation; not a jovial boyishness now, but a sincere one, and a happy. Then he drew a rather long breath. "Good old Merton!" he said quite slowly.

Aileen spoke with the simplicity of a child.

"How he must miss you!" she said.

"Not as I miss him," Clode corrected quickly.

"Merton is self-reliant; he has any number of friends and of interests, too, that would fill up his time completely, even if he never heard of me again. It's only that I have first place, not the solitary one. Without him, though, I'd feel like half a pair of tongs, a stick that can't hold on to anything to save my life."

"Why did n't he come with you?"

"Too busy," Clode answered briefly. "That was what he said; but, the more I think about it, though, I believe it was because he was too wise. He knew I'd be better to be cut off from him for a while; it may be, you know, he thought I was growing narrow and needed to be jogged out of my rut." Clode,

his arms crossed on the parapet in front of him, turned to look at Aileen questioningly. "Merton always does see things a little bit ahead of the rest of us," he added.

"How long have you known him?" Aileen put the question slowly. It seemed to her rather banal; and yet she wanted to keep Clode talking of his friend. Not only was he at his best, his most winning, in speaking to her of this chapter of his more intimate past; but, moreover, it kept him from other and more disturbing themes. And still moreover, as it seemed to Aileen, it betrayed the real nature of the man as few things else could have done. It takes far, far less talent to be a successful lover than, for ten long years, to hold the loyal liking of a friend.

Clode warmed yet more in answer to her question. It was as if, bit by bit, he were stripping off the husks of reservation in which he customarily wrapped his soul. Seen nearer, Aileen thought the soul extraordinarily upright and clean.

"If you really care to know —"

"Why do you think I asked you?" she cut in.

He laughed.

"One does ask things, you know, out of manners and all that. However, about my meeting Merton, it was like a bit out of a story."

Then — and his eyes, now on the stagnant mirror of the brown canal, now on the clustering greenery of the opposite walls, now on the topmost turrets of the lofty Belfry, lost all their wonted keenness and became beautifully grave — Carl Clode told over to Aileen the circumstances of the meeting: of his rounding a crowded corner in his motor car just in

season to see a tall, lean man flinging himself before another car to snatch a ragged baby from its path. The baby was saved, uninjured; the man, knocked down and temporarily stunned, had been rushed to the nearest hospital by Clode's car. Next day, as a matter of course, Clode had driven back to the hospital, only to find that the man, recovering swiftly, had gone his way, leaving no name behind him. Just ten days later, Clode had cancelled another engagement at the eleventh hour, in order to be present at the first performance of a new Russian symphony. At its finish, he had screwed himself about in his chair, hunting a familiar face to share in his enthusiasm, and his eyes had lighted full upon the missing stranger, seated in the chair just back of his. The rest had followed, logically and swiftly.

Clode told the story with complete simplicity, paring it of all but the most needful of details; yet it gained in his telling a beauty and a dignity born of the man's own heart. It was not Clode, the practical business magnate, who stood there on the grey Quai Vert, living over again the one romantic happening of his life; but, rather, it was Clode, the idealist, a Clode who, until now, had kept himself unrevealed to Aileen's watching eyes. She had known him loyal; she had believed him capable of an affection still and deep and lasting; but she had had no notion that Carl Clode had it in him to invest that affection with a vein of purest poetry.

And Aileen, listening, her elbows on the rail, her chin in her cupped hands, her grey eyes on his eager, animated face, marvelled. Her marvelling, though, was by no means for the little story, so easily to be

duplicated in any busy city's traffic, and by any person minded to discover coincidence in simplest happenings; but for the many-sided nature of the man himself. Clode, Carl P. J. Clode, captain of industry and, by Stanway, minor poet, dubbed a block of plainest prose, was bit by bit disclosing to her view a rich composite blended from the elements that customarily are divided among the makings of a dozen men.

And still moreover and moreover, the very man who read detective stories and gazed askance on Maeterlinck, who ignored the poetry of motion and merely liked to see things happen, was capable of a lasting friendship with another man, sane, yet threaded through and through with golden strands of genuine romance. And not only was he capable of it; but he also was capable of investing it with a force and fire, ennobling and enriching both their daily lives.

But, if he was capable of such a friendship with a man, what would not his nature have within itself, held still in reserve for its supremest climax? What would he not hold within himself to offer to the woman of his choice?

And that woman, he had told her, was herself.

And she, in her blind, self-centred satisfaction with her present lot, had turned her back upon the offer. She had argued to convince herself that, holding everything already in her hands, a change of any sort must bring her loss.

It had not needed the two months since that time, to bring her to a sense of her mistake, a sense of

her own muddled values. Before Clode had put her into her cab at Euston, had bowed his ash-grey head at parting, she had begun to have faint glimmerings of the truth. All through the intervening weeks, the glimmerings had broadened. They had been shot through and through with streaks of rosy day when, once again the night before, her eyes had rested on the keen, clean face beneath the ashy hair. All day, to-day, her surety had been growing towards its zenith; but —

Clode had said to her, that noon on the *Beatic*, that he had asked her, once and for all, to marry him. That he would never change in his desires. That he believed the time would come when she would change. That, rather than weary her with futile beggary, with insistent urging, he would quietly await the coming of that day, sure that, when it really came, she would say the word which should consecrate their waiting by their final union. And, knowing Clode, Aileen knew that he would never change. He would wait, and hope, and listen, it might be, for all eternity; but he would not break his spoken word. However, one could n't — At least, not a nice woman.

Aileen drew a long, slow, tired breath. Eternity was so very, very long, and nice conventions were so binding.

The last of Clode's story had fallen on unheeding ears. He was too much absorbed in it, too fond of certain of its parts, to be aware of Aileen's inattention, though. Instead, his eyes again upon the water, he finished it to the very end and then he fell silent. Aileen was silent, too. What was more, she

dared not break the silence, lest her speaking voice betray her breathless longing for the thing she knew better than to expect. Instead, she held herself tense, waiting despite her lack of hope, scorning her woman's heart that it should even stoop to hope.

And then, out of the stillness lying, like a cloud, between them, came a thread of song. Clode, his face serene and hopeful, his eyes, not now upon the stagnant waters, but on the soaring Belfry overhead, was half humming, half singing his favourite little lilt of song; not now, though, at its customary couplet, but in another, one which Aileen dimly remembered having heard outside her window, their first night at sea, —

“Mm hm mm hm mm kind the storm
That drives us mm hm home.”

Something rose up in the girl's throat and tore her, tore her forced calm across and again across. Must it be only storm, then? Was happiness to be gained in no other way? She mastered herself quickly, and spoke without much thought of what she said. Anything was better, in her present mood, than listening to a repetition of his phrase.

Her voice, when it came, was husky; but her words were absolutely banal.

“Surely, Mr. Clode, you have n't the right to expect much more. Is n't one such friendship all it is fair to demand of life?”

For just one instant, which seemed to Aileen unending, Clode stood silent, his eyes upon her face. Then he said gravely, —

“No, Miss Warburton; I think not. Life is never

stingy; in the end, it generally gives us what we really need. I have the one grand friendship, it is true. I realize it. I hope that I also appreciate it. But neither the having nor the appreciation can keep me from knowing I need one other person to fill full my life."

That was all he said. Aileen waited, breathless, longing, angry at her longing, to have him break the silence; but he made no sign. His eyes were clear and hopeful, his lips shut to a firm upward curve. Beside him, her dazzle all departed, her grey eyes dull, Aileen still waited. At last, though, —

"I believe I am rather tired, Mr. Clode," she told him, with a brave little laugh which seemed to him sadder than any tears. "If you won't be disappointed, I think perhaps we'd best go back to Molly."

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

LONDON was not really foggy, one morning in the middle of November; but a pale yellow veil was resting lightly above the baring branches in the parks and, far to the southeast, the Westminster towers seemed swimming in a thin, sulphurous haze. Early as it was, the motor 'buses passing Hyde Park Corner were covered thick with their morning freight of frock-coated, top-hatted draper's assistants and shabby minor clerklets, going Cityward; and, in Piccadilly, one met occasional horsemen starting for an early canter in the Row. Other early-morning pleasure-seekers were straying through the Green Park, or walking smartly up the Park side of Piccadilly in the society of their dogs; while, up the hill at Down Street, the wee grey coster donkeys came straining in their flower-laden carts, their enormous ears wagging slowly to and fro against a vivid background of swaying, tall chrysanthemums.

Indeed, the daily tide of Piccadilly was beginning to flow strongly, steadily, when Aileen and Molly, in a luggage-laden taxicab, went sliding down it for the last time, that autumn, past the familiar panorama of its sights, through the familiar bedlam of its sounds, not half so dear to the English-born as to the welcomed alien who has learned to know and love them.

Molly, at the age when every parting seems trag-

ically final, craned her neck out of the window for one last look at the beginnings of the Row. Then she settled back again with a small sigh.

"I suppose my good times are over, Auntie Aileen," she said a little sadly.

"Molly! When you are going home?" her aunt chid her gently.

Molly, her eyes on the well-loved outline of club and shop and huge hotel, shook her head.

"I know it's a hateful thing for me to say," she answered. "And yet, I feel as if I were stepping out of a poetical introduction into a book of plain prose sermons. It is such fun to be a girl, nowadays, that it's no real wonder we hate the time when we have to begin turning into women."

Aileen adopted Molly's phrasing.

"But it is much more fun to be a woman, dear."

Molly stared at her in surprise.

"Really? You find it so, Auntie Aileen?"

"Yes, Molly. As I look back, it seems to me that, when I was your age, I had n't learned what pleasure really is."

"Perhaps you did n't have such good times as I do," Molly suggested shrewdly.

"It seemed to me I did. But I've had better ones, each year."

Molly craned her neck once more. They were crossing the Circus now, and she attempted one last glimpse of the yellow-fronted Quadrant. Then,—

"I suppose that is the way one reconciles one's self to getting older," she observed. "Like tempering the wind, you know."

And then Aileen burst out laughing. Later,

though, the words set her to thinking. Molly had not been in the least impertinent, but only a trifle uncompromising. She herself had often, during the past two months, thought about Molly as being extremely young. Now and then she even had deplored the products of that youngness. Aileen's mind was scrupulously just. Therefore she could see no real reason for resenting Molly's assumption that she herself was rather old. It might be, even, that, beneath her buoyantly courteous exterior, Molly deplored the oldness just a little. Why not? Still, Aileen had not thought of that before, had not realized that she herself could be considered as passing out of the highest tide of human life.

And was she?

By the time their cab had crossed the Circus and turned into Shaftesbury Avenue, however, and was passing the great glass fronts of the motor shops, Molly had cheered perceptibly.

"Well, one has to take it as it comes," she told Aileen, with a sharp recurrence to her normal mood of optimism; "and I suppose, if one hunts with a microscope, one can find some fun in everything, even charity bazaars and false frizzles. However, at least I have the voyage ahead of me, and I mean to get all the fun out of it I can. I wonder if there will be anybody on board I know."

"It is late in the season, Molly."

"I know. Still, nowadays, people don't mind much, if they are away until December. When is Mr. Clode going back?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"Did n't you ask him, Auntie Aileen?"

"No. Really, I never thought of it. We were always talking about other things." Aileen flattered herself that she was phrasing it adroitly. "It never seemed to come up at all."

Molly, forgetful now of the motor shops and of the alluring memories which they called into being, faced her aunt accusingly.

"You mean you did n't dare," she said.

Aileen brushed some lint from her skirt; then she turned to look back, to make sure that Marie, in another cab, was well in sight and safe.

"Why not, Molly?" she asked, as casually as she was able.

Unflinchingly Molly put her thumb upon the one vulnerable spot in the whole situation.

"Because you were afraid he'd count too much on it," she responded.


There was an instant's silence. Then,—

"Molly, do you remember what I did with the key of my steamer trunk?" Aileen demanded.

For a full minute, Molly eyed her aunt with the amused tolerance which downright youth bestows upon the elaborate wiles of riper years. At last,—

"Oh, for shame, Auntie Aileen!" she burst out merrily. "I would n't think you'd get red in the face, and flounder about a little thing like that."

Euston was like many separate bedlams rolled into one, by the time their taxi slid in under the great grey archway. The whitey-yellow ship train was ready on the nearest track, panting and puffing like a dog straining at his leash and, like the dog, making one feel a little anxious lest it get away ahead of time. It was still a good twenty minutes



before the hour for starting; but everybody manifested a furious haste, urging on the porters, rushing up and down behind the laden barrows, dashing up to the luggage van to count over again the pieces stacked inside, dashing back again to hunt one's name on the paper label pasted in the carriage window, and count the windows, so many up or down from the bookstall. Indeed, in all the station, there were just three tranquil and unhurrying figures: Molly, the beseeching dog who mounts the train and wags his stumpy tail for pennies, and the man who weighs the luggage.

Aileen, detailing Molly to hunt their carriage, had taken it on herself to interview the weighing man, and coax him through his task as speedily as possible. One might as well have attempted to coax Mount Ararat. Silver was too commonplace an item in his life to allow him to consider Aileen's proffered tip as any incentive to haste; but when he looked up to hurl at her a gruff negation, he met her smile. A moment afterward, he was beckoning to Aileen's laden porter.

"All right. Six pieces? How many of you?" he demanded. "Two? Correct. They are very light, Madame." And, for an instant, his lashes brushed his cheek in a portentous wink. "Go ahead, porter! Can't you see you are blocking the way? Oh, thank you, Madame. A safe crossing to you, and a quick return to us, next year!"

Aileen, passing on her way, her pulses quickening at the hearty greeting, stood aside to let a laden truck roll by her. The vast, unwieldy boxes marked with a yellow P. looked curiously familiar to her;

familiar was the strident hail that, only a second later, fell upon her ears.

"Well, by Jove! If here is n't our Miss Warburton!"

Aileen looked up in answer to the hail. Price was bearing down upon her, his snub-nosed face beaming, his broad hand held out in greeting. Behind him came Mrs. Price, likewise beaming; and behind the Prices came the remaining quartette of Sedalians who had made up their immediate company on the *Beatic*. And the masculine Sedalians, to all seeming, had been manifesting their plutocracy by treating themselves and their feminine contingent to brand-new greeny-yellow tweeds from Selfridge's, tweeds of the latest and most distinctive shooting cuts, tweeds of a hue which was faintly reminiscent of the interior of a ripe, ripe Roquefort cheese.

Even at Euston station in the rushing moments before a ship train starts, a row of six Sedalians, clothed all alike in belted, many-pocketed coats of greeny-yellow tweed, is bound to be more or less conspicuous. In this case, however, their conspicuousness was accented by the human pivot around whom they promptly sought to circle: a tall young woman robed in the daintiest and most conservative of travelling frocks, a young woman with a buxom and pock-marked maid loitering with ostentatious oversight not ten steps in the offing. And the young woman's greeting was no less hearty than had been that of the others, her apparent disregard of on-lookers had perchance been even greater.

"You are going back on the *Beatic*, too?" Price

queried, while Aileen's glove was vanishing inside his fist. "Well, if that is n't great! We liked her so much, we decided we wouldn't stand for any other ship. The *Beatic* is like home, you know; and, after the way we've been cavorting over the map of Europe, it will seem good to settle down into our old corner of the deck and sort up our impressions. Glad you are coming, too. Is your niece along? All right; we'll have some games of shuffleboard, once we're at sea. So long! See you at Liverpool." And, driving his tweed-clothed retinue ahead of him, Price went steaming on his way.

Aileen, a little smile around her lips, stood for a minute, looking after him. Her going out of London, that November morning, was not without its sadness. In a sense, it seemed to her the ending of an episode, an epoch destined always, now, to be incomplete. All that last week before her sailing, a week which she had insisted they must spend in London, she had been restless, alternately excited and depressed, unsettled, as if waiting for a nameless something which might, at any instant, be coming towards her from around the nearest corner. In the mornings, she showed herself elated, eager. By noon, the eagerness had slacked a little; she was absent-minded, vague in her answers to Molly's talk. At night, she was dull; at bedtime listless and depressed. And, next morning, the cycle began again.

Molly, watching in respectful silence, was mystified, distressed. This was not the aunt she knew; nor, for a time, could Molly find the key to unlock the secret of the change. Then, one night when

Aileen's restless depression had surpassed all its previous limits, Molly, alone in her room, ignored her preparations for her early start, next morning, sat herself down on the corner of her bed and, her slippered toes on the rim of her open trunk, fell to considering the situation. For a time, she puzzled blindly. Then her face lighted. After all and despite her years, Auntie Aileen was nothing but a woman. The same standards would apply to her behaviour as to Molly's own. And Molly, in such a state of nerves as was her aunt, would not have had the slightest hesitation in diagnosing the cause of her own disturbance. Indeed, she had known something very like it, during those days at Bruges.

However, the next morning, the flurry of departure, coupled with her aunt's sudden return to a mood approximately normal: these caused Molly to forget the whole affair completely. Else, perhaps she might have modified her outspoken implication that Aileen's youth was largely in the past.

And Aileen, realizing the fact but vaguely heretofore, had taken Molly's utterances home to herself with a literalness born of certain of her own meditations during that last, restless week. They did not hurt her — exactly. They only magnified a curious sense of loneliness which, never in all her life, had she known before. It was as if the realization suddenly had come upon her that she was going out of England, that November morning, out of an episode which had brought her some of the sweetest, some of the most thrilling moments of her life, and that nobody knew or cared for her going, nobody

would miss her, nobody even was aware that such an episode had ever been.

Of course, there was Molly; but Molly was going with her, an item in the total of the situation. Besides, Molly was only a child, and therefore rather negligible. But, at this point, Aileen checked herself sharply. It was not altogether fair to dismiss Molly in this summary fashion, and then resent it when Molly applied the same reasoning, reversed, to herself.

In a mood where the emptiness and futility of circumstance was the main clause of her creed, Aileen had found it good to receive the hearty greetings of Price and his tweed-clothed phalanx, good to know that her appearing gave them pleasure, added to their anticipations for their homeward crossing. As for the smiling onlookers, Aileen had cared not one whit more for them than she had for the drivers of the coster carts, who stood about and scoffed at her, the while she stroked their little donkeys. She was too sure of her own dignity to have minded it, if her former shipmates had been clothed in their ancestral blankets and wampum. They were friends, speaking her tongue, born of a common blood, kindly and human and withal most indubitably glad to see her again, gladder to count on a few more days spent on the edges of her chosen circle. Their greetings drove out a little of her sense of loneliness. What if her episode were ending in futility, divested of its meaning, shorn of its climax? She would carry out of it a few good things. The enthusiastic liking of six hearty human beings, who made no bones of the fact that they looked up

to her as to one from another sphere: this in itself was no mean gift to be bringing back with her from foreign shores. At home in her own New England city, she could not have won just this at any cost. And there might be other things, things as yet she had not paused to reckon, things she had been wont to disregard, in all the crowded richness of her life.

Perhaps, after all, even if one was growing older, even if some episodes did end in flattest anticlimax, there were other good things waiting, good times which might in part atone — what was Molly's phrase? Something about tempering the wind? In spite of the renewed optimism, born of her word with Price, Aileen gave a little shudder. Had it really come to that with her? So soon? Was it time she put on mauve, and took to knitting bed-socks on hotel verandas, and to Marcus Aurelius and Mrs. Humphry Ward?

She bit her upper lip. Then, smiling, her golden head held high, she beckoned to Marie and walked up the platform to find Molly and their carriage.

On the way, there suddenly occurred to her, what she temporarily had forgotten, that on the homeward crossing there also would be Grieg. She found the memory tonic. Her smile grew happier, less forced.

It took her some little time to discover Molly. Twice, with Marie at her heels, she went the full length of the train and back again. Starting up the train again, she made a point of reading the names pasted on the glass. Two carriages, she noted, bore the name of Price. A bit farther up, she came on her own name. She looked inside the carriage. There, ensconced in the corner, her back to the win-

dow, her pretty face all smiles and twinkles, there sat her missing niece. Ensconsed there with her in the opposite corner, facing the open door, yet totally oblivious of Aileen's appearing, sat Winterbourne.

At sight of them, Aileen's vanished depression came back upon her in a sudden wave. It must be very good to be so young, so heedless of all but the things included in the passing hour. And Molly was wonderfully beautiful, as she sat there in her corner, her eyes raised full to rest on the eyes of Winterbourne. All her old witchery of charm was on her, but mellowed and modified by something else, something gentler, something distinctly new, something which, it seemed to Aileen, even in her casual glance, found its reflection in the usually impassive British countenance of Winterbourne.

There still were ten minutes before the train would start. Aileen, depressed and lonely, would yet have drawn back and left her niece to play out to the end her dainty little comedy. For that it was a comedy, no one could doubt; not, at least, after three months spent in the society of Molly. There had been many Winterbournes, in those past three months, many Winterbournes and just one Molly. Up to now, Aileen had never minded it in the least. Rather, she had gained amusement from the repetitions of the same old story. Now, though, it fretted her. And Winterbourne had taught her to play poker patience, long before it had dawned on him that there was such a person in the world as Molly. And he was older than herself, years older.

With a dejection which mastered her completely, although she would have confessed to a total inabil-

ity to analyze it, even to herself, Aileen started to draw back. She was an instant too late, however. Winterbourne had seen her and had risen to his feet.

"Good-morning, Miss Warburton! Your going away, as I've been saying to Miss Molly, has so far destroyed my appetite that I went without my breakfast, for the sake of seeing you both off. I wish I were crossing with you. I'd like another trip on the *Beatic*."

"Best come," Molly advised him gaily.

With the gesture of a boy, he turned a pocket inside out, and left it dangling. Then he faced back to Aileen.

"You had no trouble with the luggage? I was going up to help you; but Miss Molly said you had a genius for porters, so I got in here to save your corner, instead. People are such brutes, when it comes to an open window on a journey. Whatever you do, they always want it just the other way about."

Aileen, looking up to answer, yet held her peace for a moment, studying the man intently. This was not the Winterbourne whom she had known on the *Beatic*, not the grave and impenetrable Briton who had volunteered to teach her poker patience. This was a younger man, one more alert and plastic, a man who did things just because he enjoyed doing them, and not at all because they were the decent things to do. Aileen, studying the change in him, was struck with a sudden recollection of the noon in Bruges when she had seen a similar transformation work itself in Clode. And, in both cases, Molly had been the common touchstone, the magnet which

had drawn them from the normal. Molly, the child! It was one more proof of the inspired old saying, that gifts, denied to the wise and prudent, were offered unto babes.

And she, once on a time, had also been a babe. Unlike Molly, though, she had failed to realize her peculiar privilege. Instead, in her short-sightedness, she thought she had seen that privilege brighten with the years. She was learning better now.

She answered; but she turned her eyes away, a moment later, leaving the two young creatures to resume their interrupted idyll. Then she gave a start of unalloyed relief. Turning her eyes away, she had rested them full on Stanway, coming up the platform towards her, smiling, eager, his brown hat in his hand.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Down in her cabin, Molly was humming contentedly to herself, the while she made things ship-shape for the voyage. She was in Sixty-nine, next to Aileen's old room, with Haydock in attendance on them both; and, in view of her depression of the morning, Molly was curiously content. All the way across to Liverpool, she had been rather more silent, rather more thoughtful than was her normal custom; but Aileen had had little time to think of that. Instead, she had been busy on her own account, entertaining Stanway, who had lost no time, once he discovered them, in getting his reservation transferred to their carriage.

The flurry of his coming, the stir of rearranging the hand luggage: these things had left to Aileen only the most casual attention to bestow on Winterbourne and Molly. In fact, they were halfway to Rugby before Aileen discovered that Molly, not in the least cast down by her farewells to London, was smiling rapturously to herself in her own corner of the carriage. She made the discovery, moreover, by way of her sudden sense of missing the girl's usual blithe contributions to the talk. However, once he was well started, Stanway could talk for ten, let alone a simple trio like themselves. Accordingly, Aileen left her niece to meditate in peace in her

own corner. Neither did she remonstrate too much when Molly, refusing the offer of Marie's services, elected to stay in her cabin and do her own unpacking. Aileen's readjusted poise assured her that Molly was only a child, after all, and full of whims. And children's whims were always best left unnoticed; else, they turned into characteristics, before one was quite aware.

And so it happened that, as the last loop of cable fell from the landing stage, and the good ship *Beatic* dropped slowly, slowly out into the Channel, Stanway and Aileen stood together on the boat deck, staring down into the widening stripe of water between them and the English shore, staring across at the rows of kindly English faces gazing after them, faces already slightly blurred by distance. Then, once the *Beatic* came fully, surely into the tide, and her engines quickened till her whole great length was throbbing and pulsing with their muffled beat: then at length there fell away from Aileen her earlier conviction that her ended epoch was but just so much futility. Instead, quickening and throbbing within her, in time to the quickened beating of the engines, there arose the realization that, for her, the actual episode was only just begun. What it would be, where it would lead, she did not ask herself. She merely allowed herself to drift on the current of her belief in its existence. Will, ceasing temporarily, was yielding to her intuitions; she was the chip upon the tide.

They were well out in the Channel, too far from shore to distinguish the different human items of the thinning crowd, when Stanway spoke.

"It really is a strange chance that brings us back to the *Beatic*," he said thoughtfully.

Had he not been quite absorbed in his own thought, he could not have failed to see the little start with which Aileen met his words. Seeing, his egotism would have suffered slightly, for it was plain that he had been holding only a scanty corner in her reverie. She pulled herself together quickly, though.

"It's the lure of the *Beatic*," she said. "All over England, I met people who assured me that, after one crossing on her, it was impossible to think of any other ship."

"Apparently," Stanway assented. Then his accent changed completely. "Did you know that those Sedalia people were on board?"

Aileen's eyes twinkled. Despite the absence of his mourning garments, it verily was the same old Stanway who stood there at her side, the Stanway who resented as a personal affront the mere existence of that share of humanity which was alien to his standards.

"Mr. Price?" she asked demurely.

"I don't know their confounded names," Stanway assured her rather testily, for he was quick to feel the note of tolerant mirth in her voice. "I mean those flat-faced, flat-footed people whose women all wore twisty, stringy gowns, the ones on the other side of the deck."

"Did I know them, do you think?" Aileen asked, with increased demureness.

Then Stanway scored.

"No; you merely played shuffleboard with them," he reminded her.

He manifestly was so charmed with his own well-aimed shaft that Aileen allowed him a little time to revel in his marksmanship, before she showed him that he had failed to penetrate her armour. Then, —

“Oh, you do mean dear old Mr. Price and his clan,” she told him brightly. “Really and truly, I am very fond of them.”

“Then they’re not the ones I mean,” Stanway replied tartly; and Aileen, listening to his tone, privately registered the impression that Stanway, shorn of his mourning, was also a little shorn of his good manners. Or was it that, now he once more had entered the arena of the living, he felt it incumbent on himself to reassert his manhood and fight to maintain his own opinions?

“What makes you think so, Mr. Stanway?” she asked, laughing a little at his obvious bad temper.

“I know so. In the first place, they are n’t old; and, in the second, you would n’t have been fond of them in any case.” Then he relaxed into a smile. “You should see them now, though. They’re all in uniform, tweed shooting coats and hats to match. It is an unwholesome yellowish sort of green, rather like mouldy cheese, and, since they came on board, they’ve all of them put on brand-new brown boots and rose-pink ties. I saw them down below, waiting for their seats at table; they are a most astounding crew. By Jove, here they come now!”

Aileen glanced over her shoulder. Stanway spoke truly; they were a bit astounding. Not all the bluff kindness in the world could completely nullify the impression made by those six pink ties. Not all the impish daring of Aileen’s shipboard nature could

quite arouse her to the point of inflicting them upon the critical Stanway. From over her shoulder, she flung a merry nod of greeting upon Price, the leader of the line; but she also lent an ear to the pathetic murmur of the man beside her, —

“Oh, for heaven’s sake, Miss Warburton, can’t we get out of this?”

She flung her nod and smile to Price, then; but it was to Stanway that she spoke.

“Mr. Stanway, I must see the last of dear old England. Would you mind taking me to the top deck?”

Once on the top deck, however, Stanway’s testiness fell from him like the dropping of an ill-cut mantle. How could it well be otherwise? Beside him, Aileen was leaning on the rail, bonnie and blithe as a girl, her golden head capped with a bright brown toque, the collar of her brown fur coat turned up about her ears, her grey eyes lighting with merriment over their swift evasion, but her lips moulding themselves into the lines of sweet and gracious womanhood. Underneath their keel, already quickening and throbbing to the screws, the waters of the Channel danced and twinkled in the sun, and the sunlight came dancing back at them, too, from the polished windows of the chart-room on the bridge. Over their heads, the two huge yellow funnels were topped, each with its long, dusky plume of smoke, which trailed away behind them towards the greyhound Cunarder fast coming up astern, towards the distant seaport city, already fading to a smoky blur upon the skyline.

And then, all at once, the waters roughened, and the *Beatic* rose and fell, settling her huge, pulsating

body into their matchless, their ineffable rhythm. The real crossing had begun.

Stanway, the sea wind in his hawk-like face, the reflections of the westering sun in his dark eyes, once more found himself, that best self of whom already he had vouchsafed occasional glimpses to Aileen. He turned to Aileen now, all his inherent nobility written large upon his face.

“ ‘ Joy, shipmate, joy! ’ ”

he quoted to her.

“ ‘ For now the long, long anchorage we leave! ’ ”

And then he added, “ You know it, of course, Miss Warburton? ”

Silently she shook her head.

“ No? It is one of the immortal things, the sort of thing one would have given ten years out of his life to write. Listen! ” And he quoted it to the end.

Still silent, she met the ending, her eyes upon the seas, now greying and roughening with the sinking sun. Then her eyes moved slowly upward to his face. To Stanway's disappointment, they did not halt there; they went on, up and up across the raking yellow funnels, across the lofty masts, across the wireless rigging, then fell again to follow the sweeping curves of the deck on which they stood.

“ And another thing, ” she said absently at length; “ would be the building of a huge ship like the *Beatic*. Do you ever realize what it must be, to be the master brain that plans a ship like this: the lines and curves,

every one of them meaning something in the grand total of strength and speed and safety? It's like your poem, after all, the masterpiece of a creative brain."

"But not so permanent," he urged, though his dark eyes had lighted with a spark kindled at the flame in hers.

"What's permanence?" she flashed swiftly. "It's the creative act that counts, not the thing created. When it comes to that, the *Beatic* is just as much a work of art, as much genius-born, as a Brahms symphony, or a Hals cavalier."

Stanway ignored her final sentence. His mind had halted, transfixed by the one phrase which had touched his egotism. Even from Aileen, he had never looked for this unselfish appreciation of what the gift of creatorship might mean to its possessor.

"You realize it, too?" he questioned eagerly.

"It?" And to Stanway's disappointment, Aileen's face became a little blank.

However, he persisted.

"The creative gift? The desire for self-expression?"

Aileen answered impatiently, her eyes upon the sea, her mind too intent upon the question to heed any personal application that might be read into the words.

"Why do people always talk about self-expression, I wonder. It seems to me so much better worth while to be expressing something else, so much broader to try to express things outside of yourself, not to concentrate all your effort upon interpreting your own Ego."

"But, if it is the Ego that craves expression?" Stanway urged her.

She laughed. With the wind in her hair, and the sun in her eyes, and the tang of the sea upon her lips, it was impossible for her to take any question very seriously for long.

"Then I think the Ego would better become less selfish," she retorted. But, when she saw the hurt in his dark eyes, she relented. After all, she was the last person in the world to be giving voice to her opinions upon such a subject, least of all to Stanway who had had his poems published in fat little volumes with a fair amount of gilt upon the covers. "Really," she said, a little bit remorsefully; "I have n't a right to be discussing it, Mr. Stanway. So far as I know, I have n't any Ego to my name, and I never created anything but one garden hat."

With a sudden influx of adaptability, Stanway dismissed his Ego, and flung himself into her mood.

"Was it a success?" he demanded.

"My sister's puppy thought so. He particularly enjoyed the flowers; they were quite soft and made up out of ever so many little pieces." Then, quite abruptly, she grew serious once more. "Don't misunderstand me, Mr. Stanway. Even if I have n't the creative gift, I know enough to revere it, when I meet it in other people. And it has so many ways of showing itself; though, whether it's a poem, or a ship, or a symphony, or a new explosive, it amounts to the same end in the long run: the human mind putting unrelated things together to make them count in a new whole which the world has never seen before."

"Yes," he assented thoughtfully. "And yet, there is a difference."

"In the creative gift?"

"No; in the tools it uses."

"Of course. There's difference in temperament, you know, and the tools have to match it," she retorted. "You use words, ink or wind — Oh, I beg your pardon!" she added hurriedly. Then she laughed. "Really, Mr. Stanway, I think I'm getting in beyond my depth."

"Go on," he urged her, and his dark eyes were gentle, despite her iterated blows upon his vanity. "Really, I have n't any nerves; I wish you'd finish out your sentence."

However, Aileen was not to be decoyed into further danger.

"No; I've proved for all time that I have a most concrete sort of mind, the sort of mind that, if it created anything, would use a hammer and anvil for its tools. Truly, though," and, with another swift alternation, she was back at her original theme; "I'd like to feel I had the intellect and the insight to plan a ship like this, to reckon out the strains of wind and sea, to make it steady and buoyant in every sort of storm. It may not be as lasting as a painted cavalier; but it must be fully as great a strain on the creative mind."

"Yes. But one man does n't do it all," Stanway objected.

"Neither do you set your own type and bind your printed book," she retorted. "No use, Mr. Stanway! I'm a veritable woman; I idealize the most unexpected things. But tell me," and, with

a gesture as if shaking off the obsession of the ship, she turned to look up at him with a smile that giddied him completely; "what have you been doing, since I saw you last? What work, I mean?"

And Stanway, leaning on the rail, told, as she bade him. She listened, nodding now and then, now and then asking a question which brought from him a line or two, quoted from himself, in answer. It was not that Stanway was more than ordinarily egotistic, or given to prattling of his work. He merely told himself, and rightly, that it would have been worse than futile to have feigned an indifference which he did not feel. Aileen, for the hour, was interested, and showed her interest. If he repulsed it now, no telling when it might be offered to him again. And Stanway, measuring his interest in her by many days, his realization of his interest and his hopes born of it by as many weeks, was coming to the time when he felt insistent need of awakening her interest in return. For the first step towards that end, he welcomed this sudden arising of her interest in his work; for the first step, but not the final one.

For Stanway, underneath his surface affectations, was a man, and sincere withal. Moreover, he was broad enough to realize that he owned a personal self behind the professional one, broad enough, too, to believe that the personal self was far the better of the two. Not that, as a rule, he thought very much about the matter. His professional self had kept him rather busy, of late years, that and the developing the mannerisms which society at large demanded of a minor poet. The late, and recent, Mrs.

Stanway had revelled in the mannerisms; Stanway himself had regarded them with no small complacency, up to the time when he had first met Aileen. Then he had begun to doubt their inherent power to charm. Now and then he had caught a mocking gleam in Aileen's grey eyes; now and then she had turned from him to Clode or Mrs. General, with a suspicious haste.

None the less, despite his doubts, Stanway had worn his poetic mannerisms just as he had worn his mourning livery. He had sloughed them both much in the same fashion, much for the same cause: to increase his acceptableness in the grey eyes of Miss Aileen Warburton. Three weeks of wandering and meditation, followed by one ecstatic week of motoring, followed again by lonesome travel when he had gazed on other women with unseeing eyes: these had taught Stanway the old, old lesson that sorrow is not of necessity enduring; that, even if his affections were docked of certain of their activities, there was nothing to hinder their putting forth new tentacles in new directions; in short, because one Mrs. Stanway was seated in the heavenly choir, there was no reason that another Mrs. Stanway should not walk beside him on this earth.

As to the personality of this other Mrs. Stanway, the minor poet felt no doubt. Somewhere off 'Sconset Light, he had, as the phrase is, roused himself and begun to take notice. The result of his noticing, though, he had held loyally in abeyance, until such time as his mourning studs and ties had accomplished the work allotted to them by the world's convention. It had been with Aileen in

his mind that he had sought a Savile Row tailor. His reward had come more promptly than he had dared to dream. His new brown clothes had been sent home, only the night before. Now, clothed in them, he was leaning on the rail of the *Beatic's* deck, with Aileen at his side and Aileen's questions in his willing ears. It should not be his fault if, long before Sandy Hook was sighted in the offing, Aileen's interest, Aileen's questions were not shifted from his minor poems to his resurrected, reincarnated self.

Stanway, when he chose, could talk fluently and well. Just now, he did choose. None the less, it was with the psychological equivalent of a yawn that, after a long half hour, Aileen drew her fur collar closer about her ears, and suggested that the top deck was growing chilly. Stanway accepted the suggestion instantly, and led the way below. He was quite satisfied with all which the afternoon had accomplished; he had contrived to sandwich in a good deal of his own biography between his more direct replies to Aileen's questions which concerned his verse. His satisfaction would not have been increased, however, had he surmised that Aileen's later questions, carefully framed to elicit prolix reply, had been her simplest method of making it possible for her to absent herself in spirit from his company. With the sea-wind on her cheeks, the sea-tang on her lips and in her nostrils, it was impossible for her long to hold herself down to a pinpoint such as Stanway. Instead, her soul demanded its right to range, free and far, under the arching sky, over the rippling sea, above all else, across the weeks

that parted her from those other days when she had felt the *Beatic* leaping and throbbing under her. There, poised like a bird, she rested on the memory; her mind dwelt affectionately on the well-remembered trivial happenings of the voyage, called over the list of well-loved names: the Generals, Winterbourne and his British friend, and Clode.

Then, all of a sudden, she looked up and reminded Stanway that, at sunset in late November, it grows chilly.

It was a silent Aileen who followed Stanway down from the top deck. Down, she vetoed the suggestion of deck chairs, and said that it was high time she went in search of Molly. Just inside the doorway, though, she forgot Molly utterly.

It was Grieg who met her there, precisely the same Grieg she had known earlier. In all the shifting of human character, in all the development of new and perplexing traits, Aileen was conscious of an infinite restfulness and trust, as she looked straight into Grieg's dark eyes. It was impossible to question his honour, his reliability, impossible to think of him as yielding to whims and moods, to egotisms or to testy temper. He was like the heart of the seas on which he sailed, steady and strong and level; these others were like the surface waves, now rippling and glittering with sunny gold, now tossing long, angry grey arms high in the air, or frothing, white with rage. Her mind flashed back over some phases of her recent talk with Stanway. Did a man's character, indeed, develop into likeness to the medium in which his work was done? Why not?

She met Grieg with a smile, her hand extended

in frank, joyous greeting. Like all the other powers of the ship, he had been lined up at the gangway, when she came on board; his welcome had been the first one of them all to meet her ears. In the flurry of departure, though, there had been time only for the most casual words: greetings, inquiries, a bit of chaff about Grieg's making good his promise of rough weather. Then Aileen had gone her way with Molly, secure in the knowledge that, after his old custom, Grieg would look her up, directly he had a leisure moment.

Apparently, he had not waited for his leisure, but had made advance provision for her comfort. Everything showed his thoughtfulness: the reading lamp beside her bed, the plate of fruit and biscuits waiting in the window, the presence of her former stewardess whose pretty phrases of welcome ended with the explanation that Mr. Grieg had taken her from station in another part of the ship, and sent her back to Miss Warburton, because she knew her ways. These and a dozen other little things betokened plainly that Grieg had taken her merry promise to return on the *Beatic* as no mere idle word, that he had expected her and made every preparation for her pleasure.

Now, her hand outstretched, she went to meet him, eager to thank him, eager to talk with him about his record for the weeks since they had parted. Her thanks died on her lips, however, for it was Grieg who spoke, a Grieg as eager as herself, his face alight, his dark eyes shining.

"Miss Warburton, I've some good news to tell you. A boy has just brought me a wireless from

Clode. He 's coming on board at Queenstown, to go back with us."

That night, in her own cabin, Aileen tried in vain to remember whether, after all, she had thanked Grieg for his care for her. She was rather under the impression she had not.

CHAPTER TWENTY

FOUR rugs were spread out sociably in a sheltered corner of the top deck. On guard beside them, tray in hand, stood a waiting steward.

Molly had been the delinquent one, this time; but at last, capped and coated in ruddy brown, she came up the stairs, with Stanway close behind.

"Thank you so much, Steward. This is delightful. Yes, a cushion back of me, please; the rail is n't too elastic. Thank you, Mr. Stanway. Yes, that's perfect, only you will get all the wind there —"

"'On yonder lea,'"

Stanway warbled melodiously.

But Molly pounced on him with a rebuke.

"That is horribly trite of you, Mr. Stanway. I thought better of you than that. I did n't know you sang, though."

"I don't. You won't let me," Stanway grumbled.

"That's because you don't sing nice things," Molly told him ruthlessly. "But what can have become — Oh, here they come now."

Stanway continued to grumble.

"No need. We're quite as well off without them."

"Not nearly," Molly assured him frankly.

"Auntie Aileen is the dearest thing that ever sailed the high seas, and, as for Mr. Clode —"

Stanway waited.

"Well?" he said, after a longish interval.

Molly lifted her thick lashes and stared reflectively across the deck to the spot where Clode and Aileen had halted and were leaning on the rail. Then she looked up at the steward, and nodded her dismissal.

"Please put the cups down here, Steward. The others seem to be in no hurry, and it's too bad to keep you waiting."

"Well?" Stanway iterated patiently, after Molly had arranged the cups to her liking, and covered them thriftily with their saucers.

She looked at him through her lashes, and smiled bewitchingly.

"It keeps the flavour in," she explained to him then.

He forebore to urge. Thereupon, she became suddenly desirous of filling out her interrupted phrase.

"And, as for Mr. Clode, he is —" Again she paused, and fell to muffing the cups in a corner of Aileen's rug.

"Well?" Stanway demanded, for the third time. "What is Mr. Clode?"

Molly clasped her brown gloves on her knee, and gazed down at them demurely.

"He is Mr. Clode," she said. Then she became alert, eager. "Mr. Stanway, do please tell me the rest about your trip to the Lake country."

"Oh, it's rather — er —"

Molly interrupted.

"Perhaps it would be better to wait for Auntie Aileen. She was so interested. That's the charm

of Auntie Aileen; she always is interested in things, whether she cares anything about them or not. Don't they look nice together, over there against that bright blue sky?"

"Clode's too short," Stanway objected.

Molly's eyes lifted. Then they fell again. The interval, though, gave Stanway a glimpse of a merry, mocking gleam in their sea-blue depths.

"You might speak to him about it," she suggested. "Perhaps he'd put on thicker soles." Then she lifted up her voice. "Auntie Aileen! Auntie Aileen!"

"Yes?" And Aileen turned a face wherein seemed to be reflected the brightness of the sea and sky.

"Come over here a minute. I want to tell you something." Molly's voice was charged with mystery.

Stanway held his breath. He felt the young imp beside him was ready for almost any mischief, and he decidedly preferred she should not hand on to Aileen his strictures upon Clode's brief dimensions.

With leisurely steps, Aileen left the rail and, Clode beside her, came up to the edge of the out-stretched rugs. Stanway, watching her intently, said to himself that she was looking uncommonly well, that day, and Molly's loyal eyes showed she echoed his belief.

Indeed, there was nothing in Aileen's appearance to betray the fact that, despite the lulling of the sea, she had slept but fitfully, all the past night. On the contrary, she had been intensely, insistently awake, her mind leaping distractedly to and fro among all sorts of hopes and fears, of possibilities

and blind alleys of thought and action, of all the combined content and alarm and simple question which she had been standing off, ever since Grieg's news had met her, late the afternoon before.

She had taken the news with outward calm; she had passed it on to Molly and to Stanway with a brave showing of indifference, had listened smilingly to Molly's raptures and to Stanway's thinly-veiled regrets. At night, though, alone in her cabin, Marie gone and the lights switched off, Nature had had her way, even to the final shedding of a few womanish tears, tears, not of sorrow, but of indecision, of anxious question as to the conduct of the days before them all. Aileen was not a child. She knew Clode's coming back to the *Beatic* was no random move on his part, no purposeless result of chance. She also knew that, in all honour, the honour by which each true woman binds herself, she must meet him bravely, consistently. The next few days were destined, in a sense, to be final ones. It was for her to bear herself uprightly, while they lasted. Cruel to him, undignified for herself, to treat them as a period of merry, mocking warfare, without past warrant or future portent. In the darkness of her cabin, Aileen's New England conscience loomed large about her.

She fell asleep at last, slept heavily until the stopping of the *Beatic's* engines roused her from her dreams to realize a plashing and a throb beneath her windows. Eight o'clock, and the vivid sun stealing through the chinks of the barred shutters! Then, quite as a later realization, the tender! Queens-town! Clode! Only a moment afterward, she heard Haydock's muffled roar of welcome, heard the quick,

steady step coming towards her down the passage, heard the clicking of the opposite cabin door.

Marie, later on, offered a remonstrance; but Aileen held firm.

"Yes, I know it is a little faded, Marie; but I always liked it. Anyway, it is good enough to sit about the decks in. That is right. And the lapis beads, if you must have something new."

And so it came about that Clode, still lingering at his table, started to his feet in frank delight and welcome, when Aileen came past the bowing stewards in the doorway, the same Aileen who, night after night, had come to visit his dreams, tall, stately, clothed from head to heel in dusky blue, touched here and there with a gold that was no more lustrous than was the fluffy, burnished hair which framed her happy face. Aileen, the woman of his choice, core of his nature, at once the focus and the fulcrum of his life!

His hands gripped hers until she could have cried with the pain, had not the beating of her pulses made her heedless of any feeling, save the total joy which had set those pulses bounding and racing and pounding until they well-nigh stopped her breath. But, —

"Jolly sort of morning, Miss Warburton!" he told her.

And, —

"Yes, and not nearly so chilly as I supposed we 'd find it," she informed him in return.

Then suddenly she remembered that he still was gripping her hands in his and staring straight into her grey eyes, so nearly on a level with his own.

Flushing scarlet, she withdrew her hands, nodded vaguely, and passed on to her own table, acutely conscious of scores of following feminine eyes. Stanway's enthusiastic greeting did not go far to reinstate her on the summit of her customary poise; nor did her later discovery that she was trying to eat her grapefruit with a fish fork add to her composure. And the worst of it all was, she did not care. The room seemed dancing up and down around her, and she seemed dancing with it, happy, irresponsible, the while she was doing her outward best to show a proper interest in her toast and bacon.

Now and then, considering her years, Molly displayed consummate tact. On this particular morning, she outdid herself. She gobbled down her breakfast at a speed which threatened the permanent wrecking of even her healthy young digestion; then she left the table promptly, dragging Stanway in her train. Aileen kept up a brave pretence of appetite till they had vanished up the stairway, and till Clode, a minute or two later, had vanished after them. Then, dismissing sham, she loitered absently above her plate, until the deprecating coughs of her table steward warned her that she had no right to cause him to share with her in her psychologic turmoil.

Quite as a matter of course, Clode was waiting for her, when she came out on deck; quite as a matter of course, she allowed him to fall into step beside her. Then, for two complete circuits of the deck, they scarcely spoke a word. What need? The very cadence of their steps, falling together in such easy unison, made spoken words a superfluity. Their

silent acceptance, each of the other's company: this told their perfect pleasure in the meeting more eloquently than words.

At last, and out of the silence, —

"How did you know?" Aileen asked simply.

And Clode made answer, just as simply, —

"Grieg told me."

And, curiously enough, neither Clode nor Aileen at all realized that, in the bald, unprefaced simplicity of question and reply, they had passed a fresh milestone of their common journey, making their separate return more than ever difficult.

Then once more they paced the deck in silence, their eyes upon the sea. Asked, later on, they would have averred unhesitatingly that they had had an hour of eager talk.

It was Molly in the end who brought them to their senses and to a realization of the conventional habits of the place and hour. Molly's sense of humour could be made proof against most things, where her Aunt Aileen was concerned; but this rapt and taciturn promenade became too much for her gravity.

"It is the twenty-first time they've been around the deck, like a pair of deaf mutes out for an airing," she complained to Stanway, seated in the deck chair beside her. "Three miles ought to be enough for a digester. If they keep on, everybody will think they're seasick, and that would be disgraceful, on a day like this. You find a steward and get him to take some rugs and pillows. Next time they come around, I'm going to trip them up, and carry them off to the top deck. At least, they won't have the eyes of the world upon them there; and, if they go

on playing Babes in the Wood like this, we'll play robins, and bury them in rugs. Really, you know!" And Molly's eyes eked out her failing rhetoric.

In the end, according to her unvarying custom, Molly had her way.

"Good-morning, Mr. Clode," she said quietly, midway in their twenty-second round.

Clode stared vaguely at the vivid figure planted directly in his pathway. Then his eyes came to focus, to personal recollection.

"Miss Molly! But how does it happen I've not had a glimpse of you till now?" he asked, with unaffected cordiality.

Molly turned her eyes expressively upon her aunt. Then she made tranquil answer.

"I've been lurking in inconspicuous corners, I suppose. The *Beatic* is very big, you know; it takes a little time to discover everybody on board. But what a surprise you gave us!"

"You didn't expect to see me?" Clode asked banally, for he was too busy smiling at Molly and her chatter to pay any great attention to his words. Her whole bright girlish frankness was new to his experience; as before in Bruges, he found it charming.

"Not an idea, till Mr. Grieg brought the good news, yesterday. Yes, good," Molly iterated, for Clode's face had lighted at the word. "Of course, we are glad to have you crossing with us. We supposed, though, that you were home, weeks ago."

"But surely, in Bruges —"

"You said you had n't any plans," Molly interrupted him. "I'm beginning to believe that the

word is synonymous with the word *Beatic*, though, for Mr. Stanway told us the same thing. As result, he is still recovering from the surprise of meeting us at Euston, yesterday morning."

"Stanway? Is he on board, too?"

Again, for an instant, Molly's eyes sought her aunt's face. This time, she had the supreme pleasure of seeing her aunt blush furiously. She determined to accentuate the blush.

"Has n't Auntie Aileen told you? How funny!" Then she relented, and withdrew her mocking, accusing eyes from Aileen's face. "Yes, he's here, the same man, only minus his mourning garments. If you saw him, you might not know him, though. His cheering up improves him wonderfully."

"It does most of us," Clode said a little drily. "Where is he now?"

"Making things nice for you," she answered. "I sent him to get a steward and rugs and broth and things, and take them to the top deck. It's lovely, up there in the sun; and there are n't all these people in our way. I do so love just having the sea, and some friends, and nothing else at all. Don't you?"

Clode laughed. Laughing, he turned into the boy Aileen had seen appear before, from beneath the modelling of Molly's skilful hands. While she watched, she had her moment of an envious, furious longing for the ability to bring out the boy in him, as Molly could, and did. Clode was nothing to her, nothing, except the good, good friend. This coming week would, in all probability, see the ending of their contact. America was infinitely larger, the map-

ping of its intersecting social orbits infinitely more complex than any one year's tourist trail of central Europe and the north Atlantic. Once they went their ways at Twentieth Street, there was little chance that she and Clode would meet again; not, at least, while it was left to her, as Clode had phrased it, to say the word. However, in the meantime, she would have preferred it that no other woman should have had the power to stir in him chords unanswerable to her own touch.

Clode, his eyes on Molly's brilliant face, was still delaying his reply. Molly jogged what she judged to be his delinquent attention.

"Don't you? Really, Mr. Clode? Just sea and sky and friends enough to keep the other people off one?"

"Miss Molly," he queried gravely; "are you a snob?"

"I hope so," she answered, without a spark of proper penitence. "It saves any amount of time, explaining things. Else, one only lives in a perpetual state of compromise. But you've dodged my question."

"Which? Oh, about having one or two people, and all the sea one cares about? For the matter of that, I don't need to answer. Isn't it proof enough," and, for just a minute now, his eyes turned from Molly to Aileen; "that I've broken all my engagements at home, and waited over here two weeks for the *Beatic*?"

Molly, following the glance, smiled inscrutably to herself. Then she stuck out a dogskin covered little paw.

"You'll do, Mr. Clode," she said, in heartiest approval. "Now you just wait here, for a couple of minutes. I must get on an extra sweater. I'll bring yours, too, Auntie Aileen; you need n't come down. Tell Mr. Stanway I will be back in no time at all." And she vanished through the open doorway.

Molly was by no means as good as her word, however. The two minutes had lengthened to ten times their number, and Stanway, wearying of the society of the steward, had come down from the top deck in search of her, before she reappeared. However tardy, though, she was quite impenitent.

"I met Mr. Price," she explained to whomever it might concern. "The poor, dear man is so upset; his wife insists on sitting in her cabin and sorting out her postcards, instead of coming up on deck. The poor man pines for exercise, and does n't know just what to do about it. I wondered if he would n't like to come up on the top deck with —"

"Miss Molly!"

Molly peered out at Stanway through her drooping lashes.

"But I happened to think we only have four rugs up there, and it would be a bit awkward for you, if you had to share with him; he is so wide, and you are so very long. Is everybody ready? Then why don't you come? The top deck is any amount nicer."

The top deck was any amount nicer, they all of them agreed. But Clode, bringing up the rear of their small procession, had a mirthful gleam in the corner of his eye. He recalled one especial day of

his earlier crossing; and he reflected that Molly, in all truth, was Aileen's niece. Their methods were analogous. And Stanway, fuming at Molly's suggestion of Price as an addition to their circle, Stanway had been a spectacle to rejoice Clode's eyes.

Nevertheless, once they were gathered in a group on the top deck, Clode admitted to himself that he was rather mystified by the make-up of the other trio. Stanway, divested of his mourning, was plainly out in search of cheer. When he could, he sought it from Aileen. When Aileen's attention was otherwise occupied, he sought it from Molly, with apparently the same degree of zeal. And Molly had seemed independent to a fault. How long, then, would she gratefully submit to posing as her aunt's understudy? And was Stanway amusing himself with the two of them by turns? Or, quite in earnest, was he yet waiting for chance to make his choice between them, as one waits upon the flipping of a coin? Clode smiled contentedly at his own answer to the question. Let him wait. He himself, during that earlier crossing, had known what it was to stand aside and wait upon the whims of Stanway. Let him take his turn. Besides, in the end of everything, Clode believed that Fate would change the so-called turn into a permanent condition, born of his own will.

Meanwhile, it was his hour. All things pointed to his right to that belief; and he assumed it as his own, quietly, masterfully, absolutely. Even when they had followed Molly to the top deck, Clode showed no haste to put himself in the place Molly had picked out for him. Rather than that, he had loitered by the rail, detaining Aileen by his side,

until Molly's voice had cleft the air with her imperious summons. Then reluctantly he had yielded to the inevitable, as personified in Molly.

"Auntie Aileen," Molly had demanded urgently; "come over here a minute. I want to tell you something."

And Stanway palpably had been fuming once more; this time, it was with alarm at what Molly might be about to tell.

Aileen also looked a little anxious. She knew Molly, knew the skittish mood that lay upon her, knew that the girl was very, very young. For all these reasons, she judged it might be well to offer a prompt and attentive ear to Molly's coming confidence. Else, it might be delivered, *plena voce*, across the stretches of the wide top deck. Quickly, then, Aileen crossed the intervening boards, and bent above her niece.

"Yes, dearie," she said softly.

The unwonted caress implied by the diminutive caused Molly to prick up her ears. It matched the unusual lustre of her aunt's grey eyes, the unaccustomed pink that stained her cheeks. Molly registered all three facts within her memory, to be pondered over at her leisure. Then she stretched her face upward, and whispered behind her hand, albeit in a voice that might have been heard upon the bridge,—

"Auntie Aileen, our broth is getting very cold."

Stanway rose fussily, upon the instant.

"Oh, don't!" Molly cautioned him. "You'll tip it over."

But, Aileen once more within a given radius, Stanway ignored Molly utterly. Clode, looking on, ex-

pected to see the girl turn peevish at his defection; but Molly, completely disregardful of her injured dignity, smiled up at Clode, as if Stanway had never been.

"How nice, Mr. Clode!" she said exuberantly. "You are coming to sit down here beside me; are n't you? I'm longing to ask you dozens of things about your doings in Bruges, after we had gone. Was n't it the dearest place you ever saw? And the *Rose d'Argent*! And Madame!"

Carl Clode was reasonably quick to grasp a new position, especially one which concerned himself. None the less, now, it took him a good five minutes to find out that he had been outgeneralled by Molly. Contrary to all his expectations, contrary to his firm belief as to the wishes of Aileen, Aileen was now leaning on the rail, with Stanway talking obvious, albeit poetic, platitudes into her nearer ear, while he, Carl Clode, who had defied the needs of his home office, who had broken a round dozen important engagements for the mere sake of pacing the *Beatic's* decks beside Miss Aileen Warburton, now found himself hopelessly cornered into sitting flat on the top deck of the *Beatic*, his eyes upon Miss Aileen Warburton's unresponsive back, and his ears filled with the vain babblings of Miss Aileen Warburton's over-young and over-frivolous niece.

"Damn!" Mr. Carl P. J. Clode remarked, beneath his breath.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

ALL that day, then, Molly continued to act as general. Not that the girl was masterful, or disrespectful to those whom she was too polite to term her elders. She merely went stumbling on from hour to hour, disarranging Clode's plans with an apparently blind unconsciousness which caused him to grind his teeth, one minute, and laugh, the next. Just once, at bedtime, though, he had a bad half-hour. In making up the mental summing of his day, a habit born of his business training and left over from the long, unbroken weeks and years of office grind: in summing up the day's achievement and discovering how slight had been its total, he had been conscious of an instant's wonder whether Molly's seemingly erratic courses had been laid down deliberately and at the instigation of Aileen.

A little later, he dismissed the suspicion utterly. Molly might, perchance, be deliberate; though, watching her, Clode doubted. But that Aileen was instigating her to her mischief-making ways — unthinkable! Whatever the outcome of the present episode, Clode knew that, for that day, Aileen's welcome, her pleasure in his coming, in his quiet assumption of his right to his old place beside her: that these had been sincere and stable. There had been a glow in Aileen's face, that morning, a throb in her voice, a quick returning pressure in her hand-

clasp which told to Clode more, far more, indeed, than she would have considered womanly.

And, all day long, whenever Molly's busy brain flagged in its mischievous invention, Aileen had shown the plainest pleasure in Clode's presence at her side. However, still thanks to Molly, that pleasure had not had the chance to manifest itself too often. All day long and until dusk had begun to steal up upon them from across the dulling sea, their quartette, once formed, had been inseparable. Only after luncheon, for a brief and rapturous few minutes, Clode, waylaying Aileen outside the purser's office, had carried her off with him to the comparatively desolate spaces of the lower promenade. This time, they had by no means presented the appearance of deaf mutes. Their greetings, like all the things one feels most keenly, could be expressed by an almost total silence. That expressed, they, each of them, were conscious of an infinity of things which they had been waiting to say, to ask, even to explain. Viewed in the present retrospect, indeed, their weeks of wandering appeared able to gain their fullest interest only when interpreted in the light of each other's parallel experience.

With so much between them to be told over, it was hard to choose the spot for a beginning. It seemed to Clode, indeed, that they were still in the preface of their wished-for talk, when Molly's golden head appeared in the nearest doorway. An instant afterward, they heard her blithe young voice, apparently addressing some one invisible behind her.

"Oh, here they are! It is such a comfort that they have n't fallen overboard."

Then Molly, with Stanway at her heels, bore down upon them, regardless of the aggressive angle of Clode's ash-gray head.

"I really was getting so anxious about you," she proclaimed gaily from afar. "You are the most elusive pair of people. I just went to get my coat, and, when I came back, everybody had vanished. Oh, yes; of course you, Mr. Stanway. I'd have been quite lost without you. But I've been hunting you all over the ship, Auntie Aileen. Mr. Grieg hunted, too; at least, he said he'd send a steward, and Mr. Price. We've found the nicest corner, up in the sun and quite out of the wind; and I've promised to teach Mr. Stanway a new game. It really needs four to play it, though. You will come; won't you?"

"In just a few minutes, Molly."

Molly shook her head.

"I know the length of your minutes, Auntie Aileen. It does n't take more than a dozen of them to make up a November afternoon. Besides, I'm sure that Mr. Clode will love my game. Do come."

How could one withstand her, Clode queried of himself, midway between laughter and profanity. The girl was so pretty, so full of coaxing fun, so cajolingly certain that she was bound to get the things for which she asked. No one who had any spark of chivalry within him, no one could have refused her, once she raised her sea-blue eyes and gazed appealingly up into his own. Reluctantly, yet almost involuntarily, Clode turned to follow her upstairs, and Aileen, still more reluctant, turned beside him.

Molly, in her sunny, windless corner, awaited them, purring like a contented little kitten.

"There! Is n't this too charming? Sit there in the corner, Auntie Aileen. You there, Mr. Stanway. Mr. Clode and I will sit here; but you're Auntie Aileen's partner, Mr. Clode. And now just pull the rugs away a little, so we have a bare deck in the middle for our game. So." And then Molly dived into her coat pocket and produced, with a great air of mingled joy and mystery, a set of common iron jackstones.

Even Aileen, looking backwards, always confessed to herself a sneaking rapture in her memories of that hour. Not only did her irrepressible young niece produce those jackstones; but she alternately coaxed and bullied her companions into playing with them. Like Molly, Aileen was endowed with a well-grown sense of humour. The spectacle of a slightly sentimental minor poet and a famous captain of industry, neither of them very young, sitting flat on a ship's deck and playing jackstones during the major part of a November afternoon: this was a sight to rejoice the eyes and mind of a far less appreciative person than Aileen. Moreover, the facts that both men were aware that they must look supremely silly; that both were conscious, by way of aching joints and muscles, that their sun had for ever set upon the epoch when sitting flat on the deck was wholly comfortable; that both were too proud to confess the truth, and that neither one would be the first to suggest a change of pose and of amusement, and so run the risk of leaving the other in sole possession of the field: these taxed to

the uttermost limits the gravity of Aileen. And Molly played on blithely, to all seeming wholly absorbed in her childish game. Now and then, the sudden curving of her lips betrayed her; but, for the most part, one would have said she had no consciousness of any incongruities. Unlike Aileen, Molly's joy was by no means wholly in the retrospect. She took it, as she went along.

Shortly before time for tea, Molly gathered up her stones.

"I don't know how it is with you," she said blandly; "but I am beginning to feel rather crampish. Wouldn't it be a good idea to walk about a little? Oh, where is that other stone?"

For Clode had seen his opportunity, and his boot was on the missing bit of iron. With elaborate care neither to betray his senile stiffness, nor to relax his hold upon the missing stone, he rose to his feet and held out a hand to Aileen. At the same instant, his foot flew backward, carrying with it Molly's stone which slithered across the deck and landed, not in the deep sea as Clode intended, but only in the scuppers underneath a life-boat.

Before Clode could apologize, Molly had come to his relief.

"Oh, don't mind, Mr. Clode; and don't, please don't, go after it. Really, I've plenty more."

That night, his arms folded underneath his head and a cigar between his lips, Clode pondered on Molly's final phrase. In the end, he took it with more than its literal significance. In all probability, there would be no use in seeking to frustrate any one, or two, or three, of Molly's wiles. She would

have plenty more. And the worst of the matter was, the girl was charming; at least, she would have been, had she not also been a trifle inconvenient.

However, one day of the crossing was gone. There would be six more; five, in reality, for the final one would be too much upset with plans for landing, to count for very much. Still, November was the stormy season; they might be a day late, or even more than a day, if they had good luck. Then, in the dark, Clode smiled to himself at this total demolition of all his business conscience. And, in the pre-Bruges epoch, he had even wondered whether any woman could ever share his business life, least of all, precede it, as an absorbing interest.

Six, or, at most and best, seven more days ahead of him! For, like Aileen, Clode felt assured that this present crossing would mark the finish of the epoch; although, unlike Aileen, he felt no question as to the nature of that finish. Six days, or seven, more; and one day gone! That one, it seemed to Clode, had been spent in the merest marking time; at least, since the first moments of their morning meeting. Since then, he and Aileen both had been tools in Molly's reckless hands; and Molly's methods, jack-stones included, had not made for emotional progress. One day gone; and Clode's advance on his ultimate position had not been proportionately great. And Clode had no wish, at the finish, to have rushed the final stand. Rather he would have chosen a slow advance and a steady. If, as he had determined fully, Aileen should speak the last, decisive word, it would be fairer to her womanhood, more generous, to cause that word to come of her deliberate choice,

and not from any sudden, emotional demand upon her nerves.

Of the inherent generosity of his determination, Clode, constituted as he was, trained as he was by his experience of men and things, could feel no doubts at all. He had offered Aileen his supremest gift, his life; he was doing everything in his conscious power to make that gift more worthy of her taking. If will counted for anything, and self-sacrifice, he knew the time would come when she would find the gift acceptable, even to her queenly wishes. However, he, concentrated on his spiritual struggle, would be the last person in the world to recognize the supreme moment, when it came. That, in all chivalry, must be left to her. Else, he could only weary her with ill-timed and premature appeals which, by their sheer insistence, would merely delay her hoped-for acquiescence. No; his choice was immutable, eternal. It was for him to stand and wait, silent, humble, and leave her to disclose the flaming, blinding instant of her own.

Carl Clode was too much a man to shrink from the racking nerve-strain which lay ahead of him. He knew it would be no easy task to walk steadily, uprightly under Aileen's critical grey eyes; none the less, he knew his manhood, knew he could brace it to the great ordeal.

The next morning, dressing, Clode came to a vehement decision. Whatever Aileen might, or might not, think about the matter, he was no longer willing to mark time. If it suited Molly's ideas to promulgate plans for them to follow, then it should suit him to file his plans for Aileen earlier. Accordingly,

when Clode came to the dining-room a little later than was his shipboard custom, he passed directly by his table and halted at Aileen's chair.

"Good-morning, Miss Warburton. Yes, I am disgracefully late; but I have been into the depths of my trunk, in search of some photographs I took in Bruges, the day you left. If you'll be up on deck, right after breakfast, I'll bring them up and show them to you."

Molly overheard. In her interest in all things Belgian, she forgot her efforts after worldly poise, and spoke out like a small, spoiled child.

"How nice! We'll love them."

Clode looked across at her, nodding good-morning. His answer, though, was for the small, spoiled child she seemed.

"Sorry, Miss Molly; but your turn must come, a little later. I'm proud of my pictures and need to do a lot of explaining, so it's better to take you, one at a time."

For a minute, Molly's golden head rose aggressively, much as if an elderly hand had patted it in senile condescension. Then she laughed, turning to Stanway at her other side.

"No matter, Mr. Stanway," she said blandly. "We can be playing bull with Mr. Price. I promised him we'd let him give us a lesson, some morning or other; and we'd best do it now, before it grows much rougher. Mr. Winterbourne warned me," for a minute, her eyes moved back to Clode's face; "that, on shipboard in November, it's safest to *make* all your hay before the storm. Else, you *may* be left to finish raking all alone." And the

thoughtful, melancholy cadence of her final words almost annulled their hidden sting. Not quite, however.

Clode, listening, would have longed to box her ears, had he not feared a later day of reckoning. So the pussy did have claws, after all!

Breakfast over, Aileen went directly to the deck. In this, she was not consciously obedient to Clode's spoken wish, but only to her own downright desires. Stanway was very cloying; indeed, Aileen from the first had found him so, though never as much as now, when his abandonment of mourning haberdashery appeared to mark his re-entrance into the matrimonial arena. Earlier, his ostentatious sorrowing for the departed Mrs. Stanway had blunted the points of all his sugary darts. As for Molly, she was young, irresponsible. In time, even she might become a trifle boring. For the time being, indeed, it was a little tiresome to keep up the pace her youthful spirits were setting. Aileen settled herself in her deck chair to wait for Clode, and permitted herself the luxury of a small sigh of relief. Molly and Stanway well out of the way and mutually amusing, it would be very restful to drop into one of the long, long quiet talks which she and Clode had enjoyed so often, in their earlier crossing. The photographs, she knew quite well, had been only the flimsiest excuse for telling her of his intentions for the morning. Her hands clasped idly in her lap, her eyes upon the sea, she sat there, contented, waiting.

How long she sat there, she never really knew. At first, she was too content, too full of restful

expectancy, to be aware of the passing of the moments, of the deep-toned, mellow clanging of the ship's bell as it spoke the hour, even of Grieg who came into the open doorway behind her chair, gazed up and down the deck with searching, sombre eyes, asked a low question of the nearest steward, then went away again. Neither did she see Molly's roguish face, peeping out at her from that same door, before she went her vagrant way with Stanway and the cheese-green Prices.

The sea had been like glass, the day before. To-day, it was roughening into countless little ripples which turned its surface into an infinite succession of grey-edged, quivering cups of yellow light. At the deck-angle next the lounge, the red-haired Tommy Owens was busy, stretching and lashing into place the narrow canvas windshields. Already the ends of ribbon hanging from his cap were fluttering in the breeze; but the huge *Beatic* scarcely felt the pulse-like rise and fall of the seas beneath her keel. Far off on the horizon, though, the bits of cloud were scudding down the sky and banking low above her bows. And Aileen's spirits felt the coming, quickening change in all the atmosphere, although as yet it was remote and imperceptible to folk of steadier nerve. To her, however, sitting and waiting in her deck chair, it seemed that the tension of the coming storm was on her, changing her restful idling into an expectant, restless waiting for — She would not allow herself to say what.

At last, when her restlessness had grown upon her through all the stages from quiet anticipation to the extreme of irritated impatience at Clode's de-

lay, Aileen allowed herself to become aware of how the time was passing. She glanced at her watch, just as six bells rang up to her from the bows. Aileen's lips straightened ominously. As a rule, it had not been her habit to sit, deserted, in a deck chair, and await the pleasure of the masculine half of an appointment. Clode, to be sure, was always a bit arrogant. Nevertheless, delay like this surpassed —

She hesitated, received and drank her chicken broth, assented blithely to the blond deck steward's,—

“We don't often find you sitting here alone, Miss Warburton;”

—smiled, returned her empty cup, and hesitated again. Should she continue to sit still and wait for Clode, and then reduce him to atoms by her fell displeasure, or should she get up and go away, thus making public confession that she was peeved, or bored, or both? She finally decided on the earlier course, partly because it appeared to her more dignified, in part because it offered her a belated chance of ultimate enjoyment of her promised talk with Clode. Accordingly, she called the deck steward and asked him to send for Marie and some novels. She read intermittently and uncomprehendingly, until the bugle called her down to luncheon.

She met Haydock in the passage, after luncheon.

“Is Mr. Clode ill again?” she asked him, in a voice she tried her best to render casual.

“I have n't seen Mr. Clode since morning,” Haydock answered. “He went out just after breakfast, and I have n't seen him since.”

“No! Oh, don't!” Aileen spoke hurriedly; but

she was too late to prevent Haydock's knuckles from pounding on the opposite door.

"Oh, that's all right," Haydock reassured her. "It's my place to look them up occasionally, to make certain that they are all right. He was n't out at luncheon? Well, now." And the knuckles smote again, while Haydock, like a wise old parrot, tilted down his head to listen. Then he tried the door, looked in. "He is n't here, Miss Warburton, so it's plain he is n't sick. Oh, I do remember; Mr. Grieg had a steward looking for him earlier. That's where he's gone, of course." And Haydock nodded cheerily and passed on.

Clode, meanwhile, was sitting in a listless, huddled heap, in a sheltered corner near the stern. Haydock to the contrary, Clode yet was feeling sick, very sick, though not at all in the accepted sense of those who go down to the sea in ships. His pallor was ashy, rather than greeny-grey; his eyes were heavy beneath their contracted brows; his thin, firm lips, albeit shut hard together, were drooping pitifully at the corners. His hands, also shut hard together, were held between his gripping knees, as if, by the mere physical ache of pressure, he hoped to down some inward, biting pain.

Just once, a steward, rounding up his passengers for luncheon, came near with offers of assistance; for indeed it needed no trained steward's eye to realize that something was amiss. But Clode's hand motioned him away again; and, whatever the physical prostration of the man, his gesture showed the steward that he was accustomed to be obeyed.

It was not until well towards time for tea that

Clode roused himself and, with an effort bordering on the heroic, tried to pull himself together. Strong as was his effort, dominant as was his will, he only succeeded partially, however. He could fling up his head, relax the shutting of his jaws, force upward the drooping corners of his mouth; but not all the will in all the world could kindle in his eyes the light that had been glowing there at dawn. Nevertheless, he made the best showing that he could. He owed it to the woman of his choice. Whatever the nature of the overthrowing blow which had been dealt him, the time had passed when, meeting it, he was sufficient to himself. With every fibre of his bruised nature, Carl Clode was aching in his desolate need for Aileen. As bravely as he could, yet haltingly, he went in search of her, sure she would understand, would offer him her sympathy.

She saw him coming up the deck, saw the sudden ruin of his customary poise, was furious at the sudden leaping of her pulses as he came, furious at the telltale colour which she felt come rolling up across her face, while she watched him. She shut her teeth upon her lower lip to steady it; but she could not steady her breathing, could not down the beating of her heart. Something had happened, something bad. And then, all at once, the vain eternal feminine rose up within her to make war upon her womanhood. It was alien, to be sure, to all her past experience, but so had been the hours of frustrate waiting and their final end in bitter disappointment. Perchance the one of them had sprung, full-grown, from the loins of the other. In any case, it was there, ugly and dominant.

What if something had happened, something very, very bad? That was no excuse for Clode's forgetting her entirely, and leaving her there, a tucked-up mummy, to await his coming, half the day. What if he could n't come, himself? There were always stewards. Manners were manners, and cheap. They only cost a sheet of the ship's paper and a sixpence fee.

She looked up, smiling blandly, but with a steely glint in her grey eyes.

Clode, halting before her chair, was floundering through the preliminaries of an apology. She cut the apology in two; and the cutting edge in her voice matched the glint in her grey eyes.

"Don't mind it a bit, Mr. Clode," she said, with an outward show of buoyancy which she was far from feeling. "I really had n't thought of it, since breakfast. Besides, I've been most beautifully entertained. Mr. Stanway," her smile, emptily sweet as a bit of crisp *méringue*, moved to the occupant of the deck chair beside her; "has been reading me his new poems, all this afternoon. They are wonderful. And there are a few more yet; are n't there, Mr. Stanway?"

She dealt her blow; she saw that it had struck home. Then, as Clode turned away, she lowered her eyes, in pity for him, in greater pity for herself that she had stooped to allow her wounded vanity to stab any friend at all, least of all so good a friend and in such obvious pain. Stanway's later verses fell on deaf, deaf ears; the greying seas were blotted out completely by the mental picture of a drooping ash-grey head, bared in salute, and of a

face whence, all at once, the courage and the happy trust in her had all been wiped away.

Before Clode had gone ten steps from her, Aileen would have given worlds to have called him back, worlds more to have said something, anything at all, to delete the memory of her ugly, slashing blow. But Stanway was there, and her own pride, and the memory of the long hours that Clode had kept her waiting for him, without a word of explanation for his delay. Aileen was sorry; but her regeneration was by no means complete. Despite the longing, the something akin to panic in her eyes, she let Clode go his way. Heavily he went in through the open doorway, went down the stairs, and shut himself inside his cabin, to be seen no more, that night.

To Aileen Warburton, dressed with even unwonted daintiness, that night, dinner was an interminable ordeal, and bridge, up in the lounge, an agony. Bravely she sat it out, though, until *God Save the King*, telling to all the hour, offered a reason for a smothered yawn. Then, with a vague apology, she gathered in Molly and started down the stairs. At the top of the first flight, though, she was delayed by a hail from Price.

"Going down so early, Miss Warburton! That's not like you," he said. Then, in a voice too low even for Molly's curious young ears, he added kindly, "Something has gone wrong with you, to-day. I'm sorry. No; don't tell me what it is; but, if Mrs. Price or I can help, we're on hand, when you need us." And his stubby hand shut hard upon Aileen's.

To her intense shame, Aileen felt the hot tears come, in answer to the blunt, frank words of sym-

pathy. She would not deign to wipe her eyes before Molly, though, so the drops were still hanging on her lashes, when she met Grieg below.

"Have you seen Clode?" Grieg asked directly.

She shook her head, while the sudden burning of her cheeks dried away the hanging tears.

"Not since morning, really."

"I'm sorry." Grieg still spoke directly. "I hoped he'd be up with you. Poor old Clode! He needs to be looked out for a little. It's been a smashing blow."

"What has?"

"Did n't you know? I thought surely you'd have heard, by now. Still, after all, I fancy he is one to keep his bad things to himself. He had a wireless, this morning, relayed from the *Mauretania*. His best friend, a man named Merton, has just been killed in a motor accident."

Clode, lying awake in his cabin long past midnight, trying to adjust his manhood to the shock of this sudden, two-fold blow, gradually became aware that, from the cabin opposite, there was coming to his ears one of the saddest sounds to which they had ever listened: a lonely woman, sobbing, sobbing in the darkness and in the silence of the night.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Nor all of Molly's customary exuberance could wholly bridge the conversational chasms, next morning.

Clode came early to breakfast, then went his way to unfamiliar quarters of the ship. Aileen, with infinite precautions, waited in her cabin until he had gone down to breakfast, then continued to wait until there had been time for him to devour the total menu from grapefruit down to jam. By the time she appeared, only two or three people still lingered at the tables. To her regret, Stanway was of that number. For the once, Aileen would vastly have preferred to eat alone.

Stanway was looking uncommonly well, that morning, uncommonly alert. The increasing chill, born of the rising storm, had led him to put on different clothes, tweeds of lighter colour and a more obviously sporting cut. They suited well his long, lithe figure, made him look younger, more the worldling, less the minor poet. The change became him well.

Aileen, however, was too dull to note the improvement. Not that she showed it outwardly; Marie was too much an artist in her line to allow that. Instead, she had turned out her lady with enormous care, had chosen a fresh gown of dusky green, whose unfamiliar cut and colour would account for any seeming change in Aileen's face. Moreover, all the

time spent in her ministrations, Marie was pouring out on her adored lady the wordless and unquestioning sympathy she knew so well how to give. Not for nothing had Marie served the same mistress for the past dozen years; out of loyal love is born a perfect understanding.

"A lady that's always good to her maid is bound to be good to everybody," Marie was wont to say. "If things make Miss Warburton feel bad, you can be sure it is n't because she's done anything wrong, herself. We maids know."

Wherefore, seeing in Aileen's face the signs of tears and of a sleepless night, Marie vowed vengeance against an unknown sinner, the while she gave in fullest measure her tacit, heartfelt sympathy. And the sympathy did its work. Aileen had roused herself to face a world of dust and ashes. By the time that she was dressed and ready for her breakfast, she had regained the edges of her usual cheery poise.

Haydock, waylaying her in the passage, destroyed her poise with one blow.

"Did you see Mr. Clode, Miss Warburton? Really, it puts you down in the mouth, just to look at him. One of his friends has died, he tells me, had his head smashed to a jelly in an automobile. He's feeling pretty bad about it, too. He looks a sick, sick man, this morning. But," and Haydock lowered his voice mysteriously; "Mr. Clode's mourning won't have any shiny edges to it. It's eating his insides, not coming out in black buttons and that sort of flummery. Mr. Clode is all a man; he never gorryizes."

And Aileen went her way, too much cast down

in spirit even to ponder on the signification of Haydock's final word. Better far than Haydock, she knew that, as he phrased it, Clode was all a man, all. And she also knew, or thought she knew, that her own stabbing words, dictated by her woman's peevish vanity, her woman's tendency to seize on fancied slights to her egotistic dignity: that her words, falling above that other, earlier blow, had increased immeasurably Clode's present sorrow. Heartily ashamed of herself, heartily sorry, heartily resolved to make what tardy amends she could, Aileen went in to breakfast, only to find Clode gone, and Stanway, exasperatingly alert and cheery, consuming toast and marmalade, by way of passing the time until her coming.

"You are late, Miss Warburton," he rallied her buoyantly as, waving aside the steward, he rose and swung her chair to position. "I was beginning to give you up."

The words struck Aileen's nerves, and rasped them. What difference did her choice of hours make to Stanway, anyway? Her mapping out of her daily plans was done with no reference to him, she said to herself resentfully. Then she concealed her resentment underneath the little smile she kept for just such occasions and for such only, and made properly evasive answer.

Stanway continued buoyant. What was more, he dismissed his platitudes.

"I was really afraid you had gone under," he said colloquially.

"Under?" Aileen looked, as she felt, uncomprehending. Not that she meant to be snippy,

though. It was only that Stanway's mood was so alien to her own, his conversation so interrupting to the fulfilment of her intense desire to eat, and then be off in search of Clode and — yes — and pardon.

Stanway laughed, in sham apology.

"Well, seasick, if you must have the bald word," he admitted. "It's more than a bit rough, you know."

"Really, I had n't noticed," she said listlessly.

Stanway eyed her askance, for a full minute. Then, and all honour to his manhood, he spoke out.

"Miss Warburton, is anything the matter? Have I said or done something that you don't like?"

Her face went scarlet. Never had she liked Stanway half so well; never before would she have found it half so hard to tell him the simple truth, that, from her sheer indifference to his words and ways, he would have found it well-nigh impossible to offend her. She set her wits to work to reassure him, without becoming too specific.

"Not a bit, Mr. Stanway," she said, with a sincerity he could not question. "I am afraid I'm very rude, this morning; but it's not in the least intentional. I've had a bit of worry, over night."

"I'm so sorry. Can I help?" he said, and his downright accent matched her own.

Curiously enough, in her trouble which concerned another man, she felt the tonic of his protective interest. Nevertheless, she could only shake her head and answer, —

"I don't see how. I hope it will right itself. I suppose it was the merest trifle; but things always look worse, in the night. Where is Molly?"

Her question was simple, dictated, not by sequence of ideas, but by a wish to step off from dangerous ground. It was no especial wonder, though, that Stanway linked the question with what had gone before, and came to the belated conclusion that Molly was the source of Aileen's recent worriment. The conclusion led him straight to a fresh question. Was Aileen failing to understand the subtle difference in his attitudes to herself and Molly? Was Aileen, despite her outward air of unconcern, like every other woman, when it came to jealousy? Then, in that case, the sooner he cleared up the atmosphere, the better. Accordingly, and blundering in his excessive zeal, he spoke.

"She went up on deck, some time ago. What a charming little girl she is, Miss Warburton! And yet, do you know, I find her a trifle exhausting now and then. It's rather like playing dollies with a pretty child, when you long to be talking sensibly with your own coævals."

Aileen's answering smile, to his surprise, was wistful, sweet.

"I am very fond of Molly," she said quietly. "She is a dear child, and I fancy that her very childishness, her mischief, is good for us. It is so fatally easy to get into the grown-up rut, you know."

Stanway, aware that he had been near to making a bad mistake, digressed. Not for worlds would he have had Aileen discover now his doubts as to her attitude concerning Molly.

"Have you seen Clode?" he questioned casually.

His eyes were on his plate, lest, meeting Aileen's eyes, they should betray his recent discomfiture.

toast and coffee swallowed, and the steward's vigilance appeased, she would make it her first business to go in search of Clode, to tell him she was sorry and ashamed, to make sure of his forgiveness, and then to offer sympathy.

The course she had marked out for herself was not a pleasant one, not one familiar to her past experience. Nevertheless, it was not for nothing that Aileen had lain awake and pondered, all the previous night. The more she had pondered, the less lovely was the light in which she had seen herself, the less doubt hung above her decision as to the decent thing to do. Therefore, her toast and coffee choked down somehow, anyhow, she nodded to the steward and set off in search of Clode. Her mind rushed before her body, as she went. By the time her feet were on the stairs, her brain was busy with the long, long talk which was sure to follow on the heels of her coming self-abasement. To her intense disappointment, Clode was invisible; and Haydock, who alone could have furnished the clue to Clode's present whereabouts, likewise was invisible.

Aileen spent the morning in her deck chair. Her open novel, ostentatiously held up before her eyes, offered a barrier against all comers. Its unturned pages, though, betrayed the fact that it had no other function. Of the thoughts which went on behind it, Aileen's impassive face left scarcely any record. Nevertheless, Clode, had he been watching her, could not have failed to feel a certain pity, so downcast was she, so lacking in all her usual buoyancy.

But Clode was shut up in his room, smoking and

pondering on the general depravity of most things and all people. Now that the first intensity of his grief was passing — for a man like Clode loves few friends, but loves and mourns for those intensely — Clode was beginning to realize that his deepest, most lasting hurt had come to him, not from the fact of Merton's death; but from the fact that Aileen had withheld from him the sympathy he craved, that he had made his cry to her in vain. And he had trusted her implicitly, had been sure that she would be instant to see his need of pity and to answer to it. In all the little things, he had found her ready. In the great one, she had failed him utterly.

In the freshness of his disappointment, Clode neglected to ask the why and wherefore of her failing; he merely took the fact as it was, and made no effort to account for it. Indeed, with such a woman as Aileen, there would have seemed to him a certain impertinence in seeking to supply the cause for any action. The fact that she did a thing implied that she had a reason for it. The fact that she had a reason should be the same thing as the acknowledgment that it was good. It was for him to accept it simply, not weigh and measure it by self-made standards of his own.

It would have saved Clode some bitter hours, however, had he been a little less incurious. It might then have occurred to him that Aileen had something, not much, but something, to say on her own side. The average woman does not especially love to be left, stranded, in her deck chair from half-past nine to nearly five, just because the other, masculine, half of the engagement neither appears, nor sends a

message to explain his absence. Indeed, after every possible excuse had been made for Clode's neglect, Aileen, on her side, would have had just cause for resentment, had she not forfeited it by crouching to deliver a backhanded blow.

Punishment had followed swiftly. Of the two of them, that morning, Aileen was by far the more unhappy. Her unhappiness even blinded her to the increasing glory of the dark, up-leaping sea.

On her way down to luncheon, though, she had a swift recoil from her unwonted wretchedness. At the head of the last flight of stairs, she came face to face with Clode. Conscience and resentment alike vanished, in sheer pleasure at once more looking into his steady eyes.

"Where have you been, all morning?" she asked him.

Only his eyes smiled back at her, and their smile was appealing, sad.

"In my room, and — trying to get used to things."

Her heart smote her, at his eyes and accent. The blow had been harsher even than she would have thought. As Haydock had said, it put one down in the mouth to watch Clode's silent grief. Only a great humanity could know a love so great. And, if he gave a love like this to a man friend and chum, what would he not find it in his power to give to a woman, to the woman whom he chose to be — what was his word? — his royal mate?

However, one does not say outright things like these, on one's way downstairs to luncheon. Aileen's response was well within the limits of convention.

"Mr. Grieg told me you had had bad news. I am so sorry. Was it Mr. Merton?"

He nodded silently. When he could trust his voice, —

"Some time, I want to tell you. Not just yet, though. But my life seems very empty now."

Then, without more ado, he stood aside for her to pass on ahead of him. Passing, though, she met his smile; meeting it, it seemed to her that the past seven and twenty hours had been deleted utterly.

Stanway had no cause to complain of Aileen's lack of appetite, that noon; nor had Molly reason to rebel at her aunt's abstraction. Aileen herself would have been unwilling to explain the sudden change in her attitude to life. She said, however, that it was the sea; and Molly, after her morning of rocking up and down on the top deck, agreed with her.

Indeed, the sea might have accounted for almost any change, that noon. All morning long, the wind had been freshening; the clouds banked low on the horizon had spread and spread until they stretched across the sky, a leaden, solid pall of dark, dark grey. The sea was leaden, too. All the silvery lights, all the golden reflections had gone out of it. It was dark grey as the sky above the surging, tossing waste of waters, rising and falling in a syncopated rhythm that no eye could predict, none follow, opening out into deep pits of sombre grey, gathering together into lofty hills whose tops were wreathed with white and lacelike foam. And over the tossing hills and hollows, buoyant, graceful, subordinating their broken rhythm to her level one, rode the good ship *Beatic*, rising on each wave crest, dipping into

each succeeding hollow, light as a gigantic swan cutting the ripples of an Italian lake.

Aileen, her grey eyes shining, turned on Stanway, when the three of them came up from luncheon. She read the intention written in his eyes, and she felt she must forestall it quickly. Clode already vanished, probably back into his cabin, her one longing was to be alone with her surety that all was once more well between them, alone with this surety and with the rising sea.

"No, Mr. Stanway," she said to him downrightly, in answer to his unspoken question, as she read it in his eyes. "Not now. I'll come up quite soon. I want to stay down here for just a little while, and revel all alone."

Stanway's dark eyes clouded. He too loved the sea. He had had other plans for the afternoon. But, —

"Please," Aileen added gently.

And then Stanway bowed in silence, and in silence went his way. Molly was not asked to share that way, however.

Aileen, left alone as she had asked them, went directly to the lower promenade. As she had expected, she found it totally deserted. Indeed, the reason was not far to seek. Not only was the deck every now and then drenched with the sheets of flying spray; but the crests of the tossing waves, mounting higher with each moment, rose so jaggedly beside it, the hollows opened out so yawningly close below, that only a real lover of the sea could have walked there, fearless and unflinching. From the boat deck, one looked out upon the storm; below, one was in its

very midst, glorying in its strength, burning with its fury. Against each other and against the ship, the waves were beating with a ceaseless din that drowned all other sounds, save for the mighty calling of the wind that came rushing down from the waste spaces somewhere beyond the infinite horizon, came rushing across the reaches between the shallow inverted bowl of grey, grey cloud above and the rough stretches of the grey, grey sea below, came dashing against the high black walls of the *Beatic*, rumbling around her lofty yellow funnels and shrieking discordantly among the strands of rigging at the mast-heads. The whole universe, for the hour, was a mass of hanging clouds and twisting waters and roaring, crashing wind; and, atom upon the great white ship which, in her turn, was atom upon the great grey sea, Aileen Warburton, her clothing fluttering about her and her yellow hair clinging to her spray-wet face, felt herself caught into the heart of the coming storm, made one with it, until her bounding, leaping pulses were only another manifestation of the same universal rhythm which had set in motion the bounding, leaping sea.

One with it, a part of it, yet all with an odd sense of her own dominance and power! She felt her womanhood expanding to the measure of her new surroundings, even while the purely feminine part of her made its vain efforts to subdue the fluttering riot of her garments, to hold down the curling wisps and strands of hair which lashed her face.

One with it, a part of it, dominant over it, and yet curiously dependent on the other human beings who shared that dominance! And, out of it all, the

dependence was the thing that was newest to her. She resented it; but she could not down it, any more than the ship beneath her feet could down her need of the master brain and the master hand, upon the bridge. It was one thing to feel one's self a part of the spirit moving in the lashing wind and in the crashing sea; it was quite a different matter to cast one's self upon their mercy, pilotless.

And this new, aching need for pilotage —

All at once, out of the din of the seas beside her, she seemed to catch an echo of Clode's little theme. Inaudible amid the din, she sang it to herself, —

“ ‘Blest be the sorrow, kind the storm
That drives us nearer — ’ ”

“ Miss Warburton? ”

Thankful for the covering din which must have veiled her singing, she turned abruptly. Wet, dishevelled, windblown, there yet was something in her deep grey eyes new to her indomitable, self-reliant nature.

Clode, cap in hand, was standing at her elbow.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

GRIEG, invisible all day, stopped Aileen on her way to bed, that night.

"I always keep my promises, Miss Warburton," he told her gravely.

The light of a happy evening, an evening which, from coffee to *God Save the King*, she had spent with Clode in one corner of the lounge, was in her eyes, as she faced him.

"Which?"

Clode, going on ahead, heard the light laugh with which she put the question, heard the deeper laugh with which Grieg gave his answer.

"How can you puncture my pride by such a question? Didn't I promise, away back last August —"

"Really? Are we to have a veritable storm?"

He glanced over his shoulder, to assure himself that no timorous mortals were about. Then he nodded, showing his strong, white teeth in his boyish smile.

"The glass is dropping. I fancy by daylight you'll have had your fill. Shall I tell Haydock to go on duty early?"

"Never! You know I've never had an actual storm; to-day is the nearest thing to it I have ever known. Our day on the Banks was nothing in comparison."

"And to-day?"

Unconscious of herself as a young child, so completely had the sea held her in its grip, she shut her hands on a fold of her long, pale skirt.

"Wonderful! Only the sea makes such demands on one; one can't ever be broad and strong enough to fulfil them. It has changed my whole outlook, this one afternoon. Human things seem so much smaller now, some of them —" She checked herself, blushing at her own enthusiasm. Then she cast aside her enthusiasm completely, and returned to the commonplace, "You really promise us something better, Mr. Grieg?"

He laughed, as he shook his dark head warningly.

"Before morning, you may sing a different song, Miss Warburton. Anyway, it is something, if you've enjoyed to-day. From all accounts, that has n't been the general verdict. If this keeps on, you may find that you have the deck to yourself, to-morrow. I'll look you up, after breakfast, and see how you endure it."

"Never fear," she told him over her shoulder, as she went her way.

Once inside her cabin, Aileen found no falling glass was needed to assure her that the weather was growing rougher. Marie, old sailor that she was, had no small difficulty in keeping herself within reach of hooks and eyes, so impossible was it for two people to sway to and fro in unison. Reading in bed had to be abandoned, too; the droplight and its twisted cords were so charged with electricity as to be quite untouchable. Besides all that, Marie was suspiciously yellow about the corners of her lips. Aileen

dismissed her hurriedly, made her own night toilet in a casual fashion born of a wish to escape too many bumps against projecting corners, turned off the lights, and flung herself on her bed to meditate at leisure.

Impossible that she was the same Aileen Warburton who had lain there, sobbing to herself, the night before! Impossible, too, that she was the Aileen Warburton who had sailed from New York in that selfsame ship, four months ago! Her sadness of yesterday was gone. It had been just and well-deserved; but her own exceeding penitence had smudged its record into a mere illegible spot, which time and care would wipe away completely. Gone also was her self-centred poise of four months ago, gone all her surety that life had nothing better in its gift than she already owned. Frankly she now admitted to herself that her own life was incomplete. She had learned the lesson out of the bitterness of discovery that it was possible for her to suffer from another's hurt more than from her own. Frankly, too, she admitted to herself that, not often, but just now and then, she would be better for a guiding hand upon her spiritual helm. It was impossible for her to realize how and why this lesson had been forced upon her. Enough that, all at once, it had come to be part and parcel of her spiritual baggage — permanent — She needed somebody — to —

She wakened with a sudden notion that she was standing on her head. Before she had a chance to assimilate that notion, she reversed her position and apparently tried to stand upright on the low footboard of her bed. An instant afterwards, and just

as eight bells sounded the ending of the middle watch, she found herself repeating her original manoeuvre, while half a ton of water sluiced itself down across her window. Grieg's promise had made good.

Afterwards, Aileen Warburton never could account for the hours which followed. It was as if the madness of the furious sea had entered into her, possessing her completely, to the total exclusion of any thought of self, of Molly, even of Clode. All that mattered was the grandeur of the storm, the grandeur of the ship that rode upon it, now riding high upon the combers, her bows to the shrieking gale, now dipping her nose into the seas which came tumbling up across her forecastle to hurl themselves against the end of Aileen's cabin with thunderous blows. Now she stood almost on her head, now she was nearly upright again, feeling no more discomfort than a baby swung safely in a mammoth hammock, rocking, rocking safely amid the deafening turmoil of the sea.

Indeed, it was deafening, sonorous, grand in its immensity. One who has heard the wind rush, squealing, above the stormy winter seas, never afterwards can lose the lilt of it. One who has listened to the strident creaking of the ship, masterful above the fury of the storm, rhythmic in its unquestioned dominance, never can forget the grand refrain, the song of man's creation above the elemental orchestra. And the slashing, sluicing waters across the wind-swept decks! And the crashing impact of the seas, lifting on high their white-capped arms to smite the ship which rides above them, defiant of their power and without fear! And, with it all, the sense of being a

tiny, puny child rocked strongly, safely in the Mighty Arms!

And then Aileen's sense of protection faded, with all the other personal senses, blotted out completely in riotous exhilaration born of the elemental strife of wind and sea. Thought stopped. She merely lived, and exulted in the living, in the being rocked in safety, to the lilt of that tremendous lullaby.

The first greying of the dawn-light found her at her window, staring out upon the vast grey, whitefrothed seas that, one after the other, swept the *Beatic's* bows. The first stir in the passage brought her face to the crack of her opening cabin door.

"May I have a bath now, Haydock, and then some biscuits? I want to go up to the lounge."

Haydock's face fell. Not unnaturally, he misinterpreted her words, and he was badly disappointed. He had expected better things than this of his star passenger.

"It's only five o'clock, Miss Warburton; you'd best go back and have another nap," he reassured her. "Bless you, I've seen it blow ten times as hard as this."

To Haydock's surprise, Aileen laughed outright into his consoling countenance.

"But I have n't, Haydock. That's the very point of it; I want to get all the good out of it I can."

Another wave came pounding against the wall ahead of them, and Aileen clutched the swinging cabin door to hold herself upright.

Haydock, promptly squatting on his heels, looked up into her laughing face with immense approval.

"You're a game one, and no mistake, Miss War-

burton," he told her. "I've seen strong men go white and whimper over less than that. It's a goodish sea; but the *Beatic* rides it like a bird. You can see it better from the lounge, for sure. I'll be getting you a bite of something solid, while you bath, though, for it's a long while yet to breakfast."

Up in the lounge, only a pair of stewards were yet astir, for the grey dawn had not yet broadened into the greyer day. The forward windows of the lounge were flecked with brine; up on the bridge, just opposite the windows, the officers, unrecognizable in their oilskins and sou'-westers, faced pluckily the stinging gale. And before them was the raging, weltering chaos of the sea, grey for the most part, save when some white-crested comber, towering above its mates, came to break high above the *Beatic's* lofty bows, enveloping the bridge in a smother of white foam.

Seen from above, it was breathless, exhilarating. Fear was impossible; the tremendous power and glory ousted terror. Wave after wave, the ocean stretched away before them to the grey horizon line; wave after wave came towards them, mounting higher and higher as it came, until it seemed impossible that the *Beatic* should not be borne down beneath its fury. And the *Beatic*, creaking harmoniously in her every joint and bearing, faced them sturdily, advanced upon them without flinching, rose to meet them, and rode upon their summits, proud and free, master of storm and sea and blustering, biting wind. Now and then the wave procession lost the rhythm of the onward march; now and then a comber came upon them out of time, catching the *Beatic* unawares.

But the ship merely sank her nose into the brine an instant, then lifted her dripping head on high above the waters which parted before her majestic onslaught, yielding to her God-planned, man-wrought mastery. And then the same thing followed once again, and yet again. And always the shapely bows rose proudly, buoyantly, above the boiling sea.

Haydock lay in waiting, when Aileen at last yielded to the clamours of hunger, and went down to her cabin for a final grooming before breakfast. Her cheeks were scarlet with excitement, her grey eyes burnt fiercely, and her yellow hair, wetted with the spray which had drenched her utterly, clung, curling, to her brow and face.

"No need to ask if you enjoy it," he exclaimed, as proudly as if the whole storm had been of his producing. "But you are wet!"

"I went out on deck, for just a few minutes," Aileen confessed.

Haydock shook his head.

"Best keep in the lee of something," he advised.

"We'd hate to lose you over, Miss Warburton."

"You could pick me up," she told him blithely.

"No chance for that. A life-boat could n't live five minutes in this sea. It's a grand one, sure enough; and it's on the increase. Not that I'd be telling many people, though; they'd all be pulling out their rosaries. There's no danger; the *Beatic* has been through worse than this, scores of times, and never a rack on any of the tables. Mr. Grieg is down on racks. He says they are more upsetting to bad sailors than any amount of spills; but the

boys will be walking cornerwise, this morning, when they come from the cook's galley. It's something fierce down there. Not that there 'll be many people out to see!"

Aileen nodded, in merry comprehension.

"It's a bad day for bad sailors?" she queried.

"Bad! It might as well not be any day at all; they'll not know how the time is passing, nor will they care. They'll leave all the caring to us stewards; a seasick man is just about the pulpiest thing alive." Haydock shook his head in grave self-pity. "And the returns are beginning to come in," he added. "It's like to be a busy day for us. You and Mr. Clode are the only well ones out of all my people."

"Mr. Clode?" Aileen looked up, in some astonishment. After the experiences of their earlier crossing, she had not expected that Clode would be visible.

"Yes, he's found his sea-legs. It happens so, now and then. One day, a man's more dead than alive; the next bad day, you'd never know he'd ever had a qualm. Father Neptune's interest on your life insurance, I call it. I did n't expect it, though, from Mr. Clode, I must confess. He called me into his cabin just now, to ask the time; he'd forgot to wind his watch. I thought I'd find him flat as a flounder; but he was up and piping for his breakfast. Mr. Stanway is pretty bad, poor man; and your niece would be, if she'd let herself. She went up on deck just now, said she'd have Mr. Grieg discharge me, if I told you what had happened, or if I said the word *breakfast* in her hearing." And

Haydock's bellowing laughter carried a sense of cheer through all the alley.

Clode was on hand at breakfast. Aileen assured herself of so much, as she halted on the threshold to answer Grieg's cheery greeting. Clode still looked worn and wan; but the change in him had come before the storm, not after, his pallor held no incriminating tints of green. It was evident that he was on the alert for Aileen's coming; his smile met hers, before she was inside the door, and she flung him a merry nod of greeting, before she turned to Grieg.

Grieg was on his toes, that morning. He loved the storm, loved the long, slow pitching of the mighty ship, loved the creaking of well-mated timbers, the strident bellow of the gale. Moreover, he had the conscious satisfaction of having quite made good his earlier promise to Aileen, the even greater satisfaction of finding that she was as good as her own promise to enjoy it as it came. The little furrow between his brows was scarcely visible, that morning; his olive face was very smiling and content, as he advanced upon Aileen.

"It's not a case for Mother Sill, after all?" he queried merrily. "I hear you were up in the lounge, before it was really light, so totally absorbed in the howling of the storm that you did n't even hear the wailing at your very elbow."

"The wailing?"

"Yes, a man on his nerves, because he happened to be up in time to see the daily inspection of the lifeboats. It is grand; is n't it? Where is your niece?"

Aileen laughed.

"Arguing with herself about the grandeur of the

storm. She says she only needs to be let alone, and she'll come round all right. That's Molly. She never offers herself up as a candidate for consolation."

Grieg nodded.

"I'll take a look at her, nevertheless. She may need extra rugs, or something of the sort. I'll see you by and by, and receive your congratulations."

"On?"

"The storm, of course. I ordered it. A good breakfast to you! You've your steward to yourself, this morning. I'm sending you a special menu, in honour of the day." And, saluting, he turned to go in search of Molly.

On her way out from breakfast, Aileen looked about for Clode. Against the mental background of Grieg's good cheer, against the ill-suppressed hilarity of her table steward who plainly regarded his chief's special menu as a vast practical joke aimed at the seafaring qualities of his pretty American charge, Clode's quiet look of sorrow seemed to her intensely pitiful. When all the world was rioting about her, it was doubly hard to see one of her best friends in a trouble she was powerless to touch. Or was she?

The question stayed her step, already turning to the promenade where they had walked, the day before. Instead, a little of the eagerness gone from her face, she mounted the three flights of stairs in search of Molly. The fact of the matter was that she could touch Clode's trouble, could grasp it firmly and remove it almost utterly. Her womanhood recoiled sharply from the thought. She could. She even might, some day. But was she ready? A sec-

ond recoiling seemed to tell her that never, never would she be ready, so long as the initiative of that deed rested on herself —

And yet, another voice within her assured her that Clode needed her, needed her now especially. It also tried to assure her that she herself would be better — She hushed the voice insistently.

She was quite out of breath, when she reached the deck, rather as if she had been running. As she had expected, she found Molly in the most sheltered corner, with a steward detailed especially to her service and hovering in the offing, a trifle uncertain what to do for the indomitable young woman, prostrate in her deck chair, but laughing hilariously at the fact of her prostration.

“Molly?” her aunt said, from behind her chair.

Molly, recognizing sympathy in the voice, lifted a languid head.

“You, too, Auntie Aileen!” she said rebukingly. “I thought you were humane enough to turn your back upon my downfall. I’m horridly ashamed. Indeed, I think the shame stands in the way of my recovery. And Mr. Grieg came. And Haydock came. And Mr. Clode came. And Mr. Price came, only he was nice and funny. And now you’ve come. Next thing, Mr. Stanway will come, and I know I could n’t quite bear that.” She laid her languid head down again, with infinite care as to the proper angle.

“You need n’t worry,” Aileen reassured her. “Mr. Stanway was invisible at breakfast.”

“Goody!” Molly’s yellow head popped up again alertly. “You really mean it, Auntie Aileen? I’m

going down now, this very minute, to have Haydock take him my bottle of Mother Sill. It really is a very proper attention on our part; I'll send it in both our names, and maybe — he'll — send us — his thanks —" the words came jerkily, in time to Molly's thrashings to free herself from divers wrapping rugs; "embodied in a poem." And, to the total consternation of a steward who, unused to so swift a convalescence, could only make one trite interpretation of Molly's hurried exit, she scampered through the doorway, and vanished down the stairs.

Aileen laughed, as she beckoned to the steward.

"It is all right," she explained. "My niece is feeling better. I think I will take her rugs; they look so comfy. Will you please tuck me in?"

It was Price, though, who did the tucking. Since early dawn, he had been wandering up and down the ship, alternately revelling in the storm, and bemoaning the fate of the remainder of his clan who, one and all of them, were too sorely demoralized to think even of picture postcards, or of greeny-yellow tweeds. Price himself, the wet drops hanging to his countenance around which his nondescript-coloured hair clung dankly, his greenish tweed garments soaked with flying spray and warped into unseemly wrinkles, Price, when he could forget his woman-folk, was beaming. He forgot them utterly, when he came upon Aileen.

"Well," he reiterated his original verdict; "I bet on you, every time. You are the only woman on board who's up and doing, this morning. Where's your niece?"

"Gone down. No," as she read mistrustings in his eyes; "she is quite convalescent, and I fancy she'll not have a relapse. She started off on mischief; but I think, if you look, you'll find her in the dining-room."

Price laughed, as he gave a final pat to the bundle of rugs.

"Thanks. I like it best out here. One has good days enough, when one can stay inside. To-day, I want all that is coming to me." He lowered himself into the chair at Aileen's side, and sat there in a contented silence, his eyes upon the dingy canvas windshields that flapped and bellied in the gale. "Seems queer," he said at length; "that, back there in London, the motor-buses are up to their old business, going on without us, just as if we'd never been there. I had a feeling it was like a moving-picture show. We'd paid for our tickets, and sat it out; and it would stop, when we came away. And the same way with this storm. I suppose it's selfish; but I feel as if it were a show, got up for me. Odd, is n't it, what travel does for one!" And he relapsed again into his contented silence, his stubby hands clasped on his wet tweed knee.

Aileen, half buried in the rugs which yet were powerless to keep out the flying, drenching spray, eyed him thoughtfully. Odd, indeed! Price's travels had provided him with an infinity of new things to think about, to wonder about, to talk about. Of his assimilating them, though, she had the faintest sort of hopes. And they had left him curiously unchanged, curiously exempt from the fabled mellowing process supposed to result from foreign travel.

He was returning, as he had gone away, provincial of mind and interests, but a cosmopolite in his expansive good will for all his fellow men.

Well, after all, what could be better?

As if in answer to the question, Grieg halted before her chair, his high-bred face alight with a kindliness in no way second to Price's own. With just the same degree of courtesy he was wont to give to Clode, he saluted Price; when he spoke, his pleasant voice was full of frank apology.

"I hope you'll not think I am very rude," he said; "but we men get so little time off duty. I've promised myself the pleasure of taking Miss Warburton to the top deck; that is," his smile moved on to Aileen's face; "if she will come."

She rose instantly, eagerly. Her instinct told her she was receiving favour such as Grieg vouchsafed to few women.

"Of course."

Still smiling, Grieg bent to free her from the last of the rugs that clung about her. It was the smile which caught the eye of Clode, just coming out on deck. It checked his advance suddenly, and left him standing on the threshold, staring after her, as she walked away with Grieg. Once before, Clode had come in search of her. That time, Price and the steward had been busy with the rugs.

"I know you are sure-footed," Grieg was saying, as they walked down the slippery deck. "Else, I'd not dare to take you up here. Still," he smiled again; "it is our storm, you know; and I want to show you a sight you never will forget."

Indeed, the sight was unforgettable. Clinging

with one hand to the bow rail of the top deck, clinging with the other to Grieg's muscular arm, it yet at first took all of Aileen's strength and courage to maintain her footing against the gale. The effort, though, was well worth the while. Nowhere else did one so realize the vastness and the anger of the waters, nowhere else did one so realize the colossal heights and depths of the stormy seas. Wave swept above wave, and then a dozen waves, gathering into one giant comber, hurled itself above them all. The roar and crash of the storm was deafening, deafening the blows of the great waves on the *Beatic's* bows. Sometimes she rode high, high upon their crests, sometimes she stuck her bows directly into their green-grey hearts, casting the torn waters far on high, to rain back across her dripping decks. Now a huge comber broke directly on the bridge; now the bows rose to ride the next in line, rose so sharply that the foaming wake seemed rising after them, a mammoth dappled pathway up across a grey and sodden sky, only to sink and resume its rightful place along the surface of the torn and tattered sea.

Overhead, the gale was shrieking high amid the cordage, the strings of the great storm symphony against the deeper trumpetings from below. Aileen, listening, would have said that no human tone could have been heard against the uproar; yet Grieg's quiet voice, when he did speak, was clearly heard.

"Have I kept my word?" he asked her.

She tried to answer; but the wind caught her voice, and carried it all away. Perhaps it was just as well, she told herself. No words from her land-

trained lips could ever blend harmoniously with the rest of this overpowering whole.

Grieg nodded comprehension of her smile.

"It is good to find somebody else who feels it as I do," he said. "I knew you would. That's one reason I brought you up here. I find I've counted on you, all along." He spoke stumblingly, and with nothing of his usual quiet mastery of the moment that was passing him. "And there is another reason. All the way out, I've been keeping a bit of great news to myself, trying to steady to it, before I spoke about it much. To-day — it's the storm, perhaps — I could n't seem to keep it down. I wanted you to know it, first of all."

Aileen looked up sharply, met his eyes. Then, careless of her footing, she stretched out both her hands to his.

"How glad I am!" she said, and no one, hearing, could mistake the tone. And then, "Who is she?" she demanded eagerly. "Tell me," and, smiling, she yet blushed brightly at her own downright words; "tell me, Mr. Grieg, is she quite good enough for you?"

All the merriment died out of Grieg's face, leaving it grave, earnest, and full of boyish sweetness. Transferring both of Aileen's hands to his left one, he lifted his right hand and bared his dark head to the gale.

"Infinitely too good," he told her slowly. "Try as I will, I never can be half worthy to be hers." And then, while Aileen's mind still dwelt upon the chivalry of the inverted phrase, he added, "She is Margaret Lennox, Bernie's cousin."

It was not until some time afterward that Aileen bethought herself that, once upon a time, there had been conditions which might have made Grieg and herself close kin. And then she wondered how it was that, all at once and after all these years, she should have forgotten poor old Bernie so completely.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

MOLLY came on deck, metaphorically speaking, with a bound, next morning.

Despite her courage and her sense of humour, during a good part of the day before, she had been more than a little pensive. However, she had made a plucky appearance at luncheon, had even lined up in the lounge for tea. The latter function, though, had ended in a general smashing of fine china, when the captain, who mistakenly believed the storm was over, brought the *Beatic* back to her regular course, just in season to have a monstrous comber come slapping against her, broadside on. The sudden change from pitching into rolling sent all the convalescents scurrying to shelter, with the sole exception of Molly, who crammed her fists into her pockets and tramped the deck with a sturdy determination not to go below.

"It's imagination, anyway," she explained to Grieg, when he came out on deck, a little later. "If you just face about at right angles to yourself, you'll turn your rolling into pitching." Then she eyed him quizzically, and spoke with all the frankness of an irrepressible small boy. "Oh, I say, Mr. Grieg, what has happened to you?" she demanded.

Grieg tried his level best to look puzzled.

"Happened? To me?"

"Yes. You look as if —"

"Well?" he urged, for Molly had stopped in search of an expressive finish for her phrase.

"As if you'd stand on your head, if you were n't afraid the captain would catch you at it." Suddenly she digressed. "Mr. Grieg, are you afraid of the captain?" she inquired.

"Not especially. Why?"

"I am," Molly said slowly, nodding emphasis to her words. "And I'm not often afraid of people, either."

"But why?"

"Why are n't I?" Molly shrugged her shoulders. "Born so," she answered tersely.

"No; why are you afraid of the captain?"

Molly continued to be terse.

"He glowers. And he has n't a proper sense of my own personal importance. I feel as if he suspected me of wearing half-soled shoes." Then, with one of her characteristic shifts of subject, she demanded, "What good thing has happened to you, Mr. Grieg?"

With the perversity which sometimes governs chance, a steward came in search of Grieg just then; a message from the captain called him to a conference of one sort or another. Obeying the sudden summons, Grieg had only time to answer, —

"Ask your aunt, Miss Molly. She can tell you all about it."

Rapture flashed into Molly's countenance. At twenty-two, one rejoices in romance, rushes to convictions, wherever romance is concerned.

"Is it a case for congratulations?" she asked breathlessly of Grieg's retreating back.

He nodded, showing her a flushed and radiant face for just one instant. Then he saluted, and passed on.

With five headlong steps, Molly was at his side, her blue eyes glowing, her hand extended.

"Oh, Mr. Grieg! I never was so happy in my whole life!" she told him. Then she let him go his way.

Facing back again, she found that Clode had been watching the whole little scene. Moreover, in watching, his face had lost somewhat of the gravity it had worn all day, and had lighted in unconscious sympathy with the two bright faces before him.

"What's the excitement, Miss Molly?" he called banteringly.

Her eyes like stars, her cheeks scarlet, she came across the deck to where he stood. For the minute, she was dazzling in her happy beauty, in her complete unconsciousness of any self at all. Halting before him, she looked up at him with a face where girlishness and womanhood alternately were struggling for full expression. When she spoke, her young voice was hushed, not with any intent of secrecy, but out of veneration for the sacred greatness of the thing she was about to tell him.

"It is the greatest surprise I ever have had in all my life, and quite the nicest. I really had n't any notion it was coming," she told Clode slowly.

The amusement deepened in his steady eyes; his lips relaxed into a laugh.

"You speak in riddles, Miss Molly; or else, I am very dull. What's the surprise?"

She edged a trifle nearer to his side, and spoke with increased impressiveness.

"Mr. Grieg and Auntie Aileen."

Instantly every vestige of colour left Clode's face. Otherwise, he received his blow without flinching.

"How do you know, Miss Molly?" he asked her, and his voice, as he noted with some surprise, was absolutely level.

"He told me. Was n't it nice of him?" Molly bubbled exuberantly. "I'm so glad I know about it, first of all. I'm dying to kiss Auntie Aileen and cuddle her, this minute."

Clode still held himself quite steady.

"Why not?" he questioned.

Molly shook her head.

"She has n't said a word to me yet, and, till she does —" She paused expressively, and then, "We women like to keep such things to ourselves, for just a little," she added, in an elderly tone of comprehension which, at any other time, would have brought a smile to Clode's face. "Anyway, even if I don't say a word, I must just go down and look at the dear thing. What a day this has been; has n't it!" And Molly, her inner qualms once more forgotten, dashed away, quite unaware of all the harm she so unwittingly had done.

Clode, though, was aware, quite well aware.

Not that he laid the blame on Molly, though. Rather, he blamed himself. At times, mere optimistic blindness becomes closely akin to crime.

The physical storm passed away during the night. The mental one, it always seemed to Clode, looking backward, waxed as the other waned, and kept its fury all within the limits of his own small cabin. It left its mark upon him, too, a mark which only long

weeks would obliterate. Nevertheless, he braced himself to appear at breakfast quite in his usual way. In the general babble of the reappearing invalids, he knew that any change in him would be unlikely to be noticed.

From his place at table, he saw Molly and Aileen when they entered, nodded his usual greeting, stared hard after them. Molly's cuddling powers appeared to be in full vigour still; her brown sleeve had been belting her aunt's blue frock, when they came down the stairs. As for Aileen, her face and bearing reflected the brightness of the sunny morning. Search her face as he would, Clode could discover there no traces of a more exuberant and personal joy. However, the past weeks and, yet more, the past twelve hours, had taught Carl Clode that Aileen's heart was not worn on her sleeve, by any means.

He braced himself again to the surety which had been his one support, the night before. Best have it Grieg of all men, since it was not to be himself. The hurt now was terrific. It would have been mortal if, in place of Grieg, it had been another man of flimsier stuff. Grieg was like a bit of old mahogany, fine-grained, strong, and polished.

Breakfast over, Molly took command of the morning's programme.

"Auntie Aileen, you can have just half an hour to ponder on your many mercies, while I write up my diary. It is four days behind, and I shall get the time all mixed into a tangle, unless I go about it."

"Do modern girls keep diaries, Miss Molly?" Stanway asked her. "I thought that habit went out with the Royal Consort."

Molly drew down her mouth sedately.

"It depends on the parental point of view, Mr. Stanway. When I was young and in college, I'd have — er — well, booed at the suggestion I'd ever sink so low as to keep a journal. Girls don't. But when your going to Europe depends on it — Why, then you change your mind. My father is a man of theories; and a journal happens to be one of them. Mine is a good deal like poor Mrs. Price's picture postcards; it needs any amount of sorting over, and I've left gaps for cribs from Baedeker, to be put in when I have more time. All the best of it is in cipher, anyway. Miss Ryerson used to insist on reading it over, so I had to devise a scheme of my own. *Hymn* means walking in the Park, for instance, and *Watts* is Winterbourne. Really, it's very nice to read," Molly concluded suddenly.

"Bring it up on deck."

"No; you are n't in it — but once." Molly's face wrinkled into a smile.

"Under what code name?" Stanway queried expectantly.

Molly, with the ruthlessness of youth, proceeded to put him in his proper place.

"Oh, I wrote you in as Mr. Stanway, the American poet," she told him, with a literalness which somehow took the pleasure from the glory which the phrase implied. Then she turned back to Aileen. "I'll be back here, in just half an hour," she repeated. "You'll be ready then?"

Aileen halted in the open doorway leading to the deck which, divested of its windshields, and shining

spotless in the sun, had quite resumed its customary look of cheer.

"Ready for what, Molly?"

Molly's arm went around her aunt's waist once more.

"Dear Auntie Aileen," she said merrily; "what a grand forgettery you do have, to-day! Still," she lifted her eyes to Aileen's slightly mystified face; "I don't know that I much wonder." And she emphasized her meaning by giving her aunt a little shake and then a squeeze.

"But, Molly —"

"Yes, I know all about it," Molly reassured her blithely. "Now you go and sit down, and think about things till I am ready. You know I told you Tommy Owens has made me a grand ring for deck tennis. Mr. Stanway has promised to play, and where is — Oh, there he is!" And Molly, leaving her aunt to ponder on the cause for this fervid showing of affection, went dashing down the deck towards the chair where Clode was seated, to all seeming totally engrossed in a serious-looking book.

Clode looked up at her whirlwind approach, managed to smile. Indeed, it would have been cruel to have denied a smile to anything even one-half so blithe as Molly looked, when she came to a halt beside his chair.

"Mr. Clode, we are hunting for you," she said.

"With good success, apparently," he parried, as lightly as he was able.

"Precisely. And now I am going to proceed to make use of you."

"At your service," he told her gravely.

Molly glanced at her watch.

"Half-past nine. You'll please report for deck tennis, at exactly ten, on the other side of this deck."

Clode shook his ash-grey head.

"I don't know how to play," he answered.

"Never mind. Neither does Mr. Stanway; but Auntie Aileen and I will teach you," Molly encouraged him. "Really, it is very easy, much easier than the real kind."

"I am sorry, Miss Molly; but I am afraid —"

"But why not?" she interrupted. "We need you to fill out the number. Not that we don't want you, anyway, Mr. Clode," she amended hastily. "You know I did n't mean that."

"I am sorry," he iterated slowly; "but —".

A suspicion of a becoming pout hovered around Molly's lips, as she lifted her blue eyes to Clode.

"But you always do things with us, Mr. Clode," she cajoled him.

His answering smile was the merest twisting of his lips. His eyes were quite unsmiling, almost stern.

"I have had a grand holiday, Miss Molly. It can't go on for ever, though."

Forgetting her diary, Molly flung herself into the chair beside him, and stared at him with wide and serious eyes.

"Mr. Clode, are you cross about something?" she demanded.

"I hope not, Miss Molly."

"Or sick, or ill, or anything?"

"No."

"Or just worried?"

He hesitated; then, seeing no prospect of an ending of the questions, he decided to speak a fraction of the truth.

"Yes, I suppose that is about it," he admitted slowly; "I'm just worried."

"I'm very sorry," Molly told him soberly. "I hate my friends to worry. Can I help?"

"Only as you are doing, by being sorry," Clode said, and the simple words held meaning.

Molly drew a deep sigh.

"I wish it had n't come, to-day, just when the sun is shining and we're, all the rest of us, so happy," she said regretfully. "It seems so selfish for us others, after all the good times we've had together, to go off to amuse ourselves, and leave you here alone. And yet, I suppose you'd rather."

"Yes," Clode assented quite steadily; "I'd rather."

He wished the child would go and leave him. He felt he could not hold out much longer, unflinching, under her keen young gaze. However, Molly lingered, in manifest irresolution; as she had said, it did seem to her very selfish to go away and leave Clode alone with his worry. She half rose from her chair; then she sat down again, her elbows on her knees, her round little chin in her cupped palms.

"Mr. Clode, I wish I could do something to help out," she said, with a sweet gravity born of the mother longing to help a man in trouble. "Tell me, is it — something that is going to last?"

"One can't ever really tell, Miss Molly; but I am afraid it is."

Molly's face lighted with a sudden comprehension which, however, as it chanced, was all quite wrong.

"Oh, of course! I'm sorry I forgot about it, Mr. Clode; I truly didn't mean to be a beast. Auntie Aileen told me about poor Mr. Merton. I ought to have remembered." And then, as Clode's face did not answer to her words, she made an effort after the consolation that she longed to give him, yet, out of her lack of like experience, knew not how to phrase. "It must have been terrible to lose a friend like that," she went on slowly, and it was plain to Clode that she was hunting bravely for the words to clothe her girlish thought, so alien to all her usual gay reticences; "but he's only just gone on ahead of you; he'll wait for you, you know. And, over here, perhaps some other friend will come in, not to fill up his place, but to keep you from being too lonely without him."

The girlish voice faltered and fell away. Clode's eyes were fixed upon the deck; his lips twitched nervously. Molly's words, albeit inspired by a total misconception of the case, had touched him keenly, not only by their young efforts to give comfort; but by their unconscious reminder of how near he had been to forgetting Merton, good old Merton, in the grief of this second and more bitter loss. And Molly's prediction that some other friend would come in: that would have been prophetic, had not the negative already come to pass.

But Molly was waiting beside him, her wide blue eyes, wet now, still fixed on his face, hoping to read some sign that her words of comfort had gone home.

Clode raised his eyes, met hers, then let his eyes fall to the deck again.

"Not now, Miss Molly. I used to hope so; I know now that it can never be."

Then abruptly he walked away and left her. Clode was steadier than most men; but now he felt that he could bear nothing more.

Stanway, meanwhile, had halted beside Aileen in the doorway, watching Molly's headlong descent upon Clode. Then, once the girl was safely out of hearing, he had turned to Aileen and spoken with an authority that held in it the echo of his accent in his words to her at Blenheim Park, weeks on weeks before.

"Shall we walk a little? It is chilly, standing still."

Wondering at his tone, she yet assented. He fell into step beside her, and together they made the full circuit of the deck, and then once more. At last, he stopped her in a sunny angle of the bow, and stood beside her, leaning on the rail.

"Miss Warburton," he said very slowly; "you remember our motor party?"

She nodded, her eyes upon the sea, all blue and gold and dancing under the sunny sky.

"Yes."

"And Blenheim Park?"

"Of course."

His dark face flushed a little, at the utter impersonality of her assenting accent. It was plain to him that Aileen's memories concerned themselves with running deer, and grazing sheep, and the lonely shaft upon the quiet hill, not with the words that

he had framed so carefully, in his honest endeavour to combine two loyalties into the even fabric of his life.

Aileen's next words confirmed his theories.

"Was n't it lovely and peaceful there? I did love it. But, for that matter, it is peaceful enough here. Who would ever think that this was the same sea that was tossing us about, all yesterday? To-day, there's hardly any swell. Watch the foremast against that bit of cloud, and see how steady we are."

Stanway shut his hands upon the rail. He had not brought Aileen there to talk of foremasts. Moreover, it was disconcerting to discover that Blenheim Park had left so casual an impress on her mind. He had thought to open a trail into her woman's consciousness, which it would be easy for him to follow up, once the proper time had come. The time, he believed, was now; the trail, to his no small disgust, he found obliterated utterly.

"Miss Warburton?"

"Yes." She still spoke absently, her eyes upon the sea.

"At Blenheim, I told you the time would come, when I should have something to say to you, to tell, to ask. You promised me then that you would listen."

Abruptly, she turned her eyes on him. She remembered now.

"Well?" she said tentatively.

He could not fail to feel the chill in her manner. Nevertheless, he kept on bravely.

"The time has come, I think. Earlier, it seemed a bit disloyal to — to the past. Not now, though.

Miss Warburton, I am going to ask of you the highest gift — ”

Aileen, as if involuntarily, flung up her hand in an appeal for silence.

“ Oh, don’t ! ” she said.

His hawk-like face reddened. Then it grew gentle. The self-consciousness, too, all went out of his manner. It was a humble boy who stood before her, begging for her favour.

“ Miss Warburton, ” he said quite simply ; “ I love you dearly. Will you be my wife ? ”

She shook her head. Then, resting her elbows on the rail, she covered her eyes with her interlocked fingers. Why was it her fate, she asked herself with sudden bitterness, to have to deal such blows as the one before her ? Was she to blame ? Light in her conduct ? Unwomanly ? One by one, she asked herself the questions. One by one, her conscience acquitted her of their implied charges. No ; in all honour, no. She had been friends with all men, had smiled on them with a casual liking which was practically impersonal. They were a pleasant part of her ship life, one and all ; she liked them heartily, was grateful to them for their efforts to amuse her, was gracious to them all in turn, from red-haired Tommy Owens and the blond deck steward up to Price and Stanway. They all were incidents to her ; she had meant to be an incident to them, an agreeable incident to them one and all from Tommy Owens up. No ; not all, perhaps. Certainly not Grieg, whose friendship she had come to count upon as lasting. Nor — she would be honest with herself — no ; nor Clode.

“ Aileen ? ” Stanway was saying gently.

She lifted up her head. Her eyes were wet; but she faced him very bravely.

"Mr. Stanway," she answered him, with a sweet, grave directness which sought for no iterated argument, allowed no question of her real meaning; "I can't marry you — ever. I like you, I've enjoyed you, but I don't love you in the least. No, wait! It is no use to urge me. I shall never love you. It's not that it is too soon; it is n't because, when I first knew you, you were — were wearing black for the first Mrs. Stanway. The very fact that you were so loyal to her would only go to show that you would be just as loyal to any woman whom you might ask to come into her place. That's not the trouble at all. It is only this: that, even though I know you are doing me all honour, I can't be your wife. It is impossible."

Stanway shut his teeth for just a minute. As a rule, life had always given him the things he had desired. He took his present refusal badly. The unexpected hurt of it made him show out the brute beneath the gentleman.

"Is there some one else, then?" he asked harshly.

Aileen lifted up her head. Not near so tall as was Stanway, she yet contrived in some way to produce the effect of looking down on him. Moreover, her grey eyes were stern.

"Forgive me, Mr. Stanway," she said coldly; "but I am unable to see what right you have to ask that question."

And then she went away and left him standing there alone.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

IN the end, then, Molly played tennis singles, with Price for adversary.

Molly's session with her journal proved to be a long one; not that she had so much to record, but her recordings were interrupted by periods of wondering what had come over Clode. Molly, young athlete that she was, at last came to the conclusion that there was a second wind to all things, even to sorrow. Else, Clode's apparent rally from the first shock of his grief would never have been followed by this absolute collapsing of his courage. Molly shrugged her pretty shoulders. Her own experience in basket ball and kindred forms of exercise had taught her that one's second wind was likely to be holding out indefinitely. A pleasant prospect for the remainder of their voyage, if Clode, easily her first favourite on board, were to remain a blighted being! Moreover, if he had torn his hair and made his moan specifically, she could at least have had the feminine pleasure of seeking to console him; but his chill, still aloofness had made it well-nigh impossible to come within consoling distance. When a man of Clode's character and temperament gave out the impression that all he asked was to be let alone, left to go his unmolested way, Molly was quite well aware that it was prudent to grant to him the full fruition of his wishes. However, it was provoking to have their

good quartette broken, midway in the voyage. And just when Auntie Aileen —

With a petulant splash, Molly chronicled her final items, shut her book upon her blotter and pounded it malignly with her clenched fist. It was the best substitute at hand for Merton, whom Molly would have liked to pound for embarking on the fatal motor trip which had spoiled all their delightful crossing. Of course, he probably was a deplorable loss to the world at large. Still, she had never seen him, and she had seen Clode. Moreover, she wanted Clode to come and play deck tennis. She flung her book into her trunk and turned the key. She would go in search of Stanway. At least, he was chronic, granted there was not too bad a sea.

To her surprise and disgust, Stanway had vanished utterly, leaving no trail behind. Molly, her fists in her pockets and her golden head erect and masterful, made a complete turn of the boat deck, a complete turn of both promenades, and even clambered to the top deck in her fruitless search. Then, as a last resort, she stuck her head in at the lounge door. No Stanway was in sight. Far, far in the opposite corner, Aileen sat writing letters with a violent industry which Molly, realizing the limitations of the mid-Atlantic mail service, recognized as the merest sham. Moreover, all her aunt's customary look of cheer had vanished; her moral plumes drooped visibly. Nice women, Aileen was still telling herself remorselessly, did not have irrelevant proposals descending on them unawares, especially not nice women travelling, to all intents and purposes, alone. With self-flagellations such as these, Aileen

was diversifying her period of writing letters, so it was no especial wonder that her niece found her a little downcast.

Not that that fact feazed Molly in the least, however. She knew, or thought that she knew, her aunt had every reason for good cheer. She also knew, beyond all peradventure, that her own morning plans demanded Stanway, and that Aileen was the last person seen in Stanway's society. Therefore she swept down on Aileen remorselessly.

"Auntie Aileen, what have you done with Mr. Stanway?" she demanded, as accusingly as if she had suspected her aunt of having the missing minor poet concealed somewhere about her person.

"Mr. Stanway?"

"Yes. I want him." Molly's tone implied that her wanting him was reason enough that she should have him.

"I don't know where he is, Molly."

"But you had him. The last I saw of him, he was with you. I want him to play deck tennis. Don't you really know where he is?"

"I have n't an idea," Aileen said quietly, but her rising colour gave the lie to her accent.

"Well, you need n't look so guilty, then," Molly made irreverent retort. "I do believe that you've been up to mischief, Auntie Aileen. You could n't look much more self-conscious, if poor Mr. Stanway had been proposing to you."

"Molly!"

"Yes, I know," Molly returned, with only a slight suggestion of contrition. "I am aware that I am very vulgar; but I am too cross to care much if I

am. This whole morning going to waste, and after I have squandered three whole shillings on Tommy Owens! It's a shame. I go to do my duty by my parents, and leave you philandering with Mr. Stanway. When I come back, he's gone and hidden himself somewhere, and you are pretending to write letters that you know can't be posted until you've had time to repent of them, ten times over. I know you've been in mischief, if you are my aunt. Look up here!"

Bravely Aileen tried to lift her eyes to meet the blue eyes fixed upon her in an accusal which was by no means wholly mockery. Her eyes dropped back again, however, and the colour heightened more than ever in her cheeks.

Molly pounced on her indignantly, put her hand under Aileen's chin and tilted it up till their eyes met.

"Auntie Aileen," she demanded sternly; "do you think you're playing fair?"

"Fair, Molly? To whom?"

"To Mr. Grieg," Molly responded hotly. "He is an altogether darling, and I won't stand by and see him made a fool of."

For an instant, Aileen stared at her niece in total stupefaction. Then she smiled. Molly was young, headlong, illogical, even to the point of totally misconstruing the frank friendship between herself and Grieg. Well, let her misconstrue it, if she chose. Better that, than having to listen to her random guesses as to Stanway, guesses which hit much nearer to the bull's-eye of the fact than Molly, uttering them, was at all aware. And the fact that she

herself, of all on shipboard, was holding Grieg's great secret in her care: this made Aileen comparatively deaf to that phase of Molly's babble.

Accordingly, she turned back to her letters with a little laugh.

"Molly, dear," she told her niece from over her shoulder; "I really think that you don't need to worry. Mr. Grieg is a darling, as you say; but I fancy he can fight his battles for himself. And, as for Mr. Stanway, I've no idea where he is. Have you asked Mr. Clode?"

Molly shook her yellow head.

"Mr. Clode is sitting on his shoulder-blades in his deck chair, sunk in deepest melancholy," she answered, with a flippancy born of exasperation. "I can't rouse him to any sort of consciousness, much less to tennis. Oh, there's Mr. Price! Maybe he will." And Molly, testiness and exasperation alike vanished utterly, went dashing off in pursuit of a cheese-green back, already yellowing badly in the region of the shoulders.

Aileen, left alone, went back to her pretext of writing letters. Then, her mind on Molly's chatter, she tore her sheet across impatiently. What was it Molly had said? Sunk in deepest melancholy? And alone? Surely, it would be the part of mere humanity, were she to go to look him up and stir him to the point of talking of impersonal things remote from Merton's tragic fate. Moreover, after her unexpected, her disturbing, interview with Stanway, Clode's society would be restful and rather tonic. Her joining him on deck for an hour of idle gossip committed her to nothing. He need not know how

deliberately she had gone out to look him up. But first — She took a long look out of the nearest window, then nodded to herself in manifest content. Far down the starboard side of the deck, Molly's bright brown costume and Price's faded green one could be seen prancing to and fro on either side the outstretched rope, one buoyant as a bit of thistle-down, the other clumsy as a dancing bear.

Clode looked up, saw her coming, rose and smiled. He was cordial, yet Aileen was instantly conscious of a change in the quality of the cordiality. Its spontaneity was gone. Moreover, when he had settled Aileen in her deck chair, he went back to his own, on the other side of Molly's empty one. The change gave Aileen something like a chill. As a rule, Clode dropped down in Stanway's chair, whenever it was vacant. Quite automatically, Aileen opened the book she had caught up from the lounge library, to serve as excuse for her being in her chair. She stared at its opening pages, an instant, with unseeing, troubled eyes. Then she turned to Clode.

"What a wonderful morning it is!" she told him most unnecessarily. Still, she felt an imperative need to be saying something, and such need usually drives one back upon the safe subject of the weather.

Clode looked up.

"Yes. It is a joyous change from yesterday," he assented, in a voice which, try as he would, he yet could not make quite natural.

"But you'd have hated missing such a storm, after all," Aileen suggested.

"I'm not too sure. Storms have to come, of course; but I can't see why it is one's duty to enjoy

them." For the moment, it was Carl P. J. Clode who spoke.

Aileen flushed. It was a new experience for her to be addressed so curtly. Moreover, she discovered that Clode, answering, had merely shut his book upon a marking finger, not closed it definitely. The fact displeased her, not so much of itself, as because it emphasized a wholly unwarrantable change in Clode. Or had the man moved his mental clock backward, in order that he might muse once more upon the buried grievance of their earlier misunderstanding?

There came a little pause between them. Clode was impenitent, Aileen indignant. And, on the starboard deck, Molly, unconscious cause of all the trouble, was capering wildly to and fro, and sending out across the seas her warning cry,—

"Love all!"

"But, even if you did n't care about it for yourself, Mr. Clode," Aileen said lightly; "you ought to be generous enough to have rejoiced in it for the sake of Mr. Grieg and me."

Clode shut his book definitely now. Definitely he rose to his feet. It was coming now: her announcement of the fact that had overturned his moral universe; and, for the present, he felt he lacked the strength and nerve to meet it as he ought, with platitude and with prolix congratulation. Mumbling an excuse which was quite inaudible, he turned and fled.

For just a minute, Aileen stared after him in consternation. What had happened? What had come in between them? Who had done this thing? For of Clode's inherent loyalty, his personal integrity, she felt no doubts. The tears came into

her grey eyes. Then, with a furtive glance to make sure that no one saw her, she lifted her book and wiped them away behind its open pages.

Suddenly she stiffened, and her cheeks grew scarlet. That was it, of course. Clode had taken this brutal method of bringing her to heel. The whistle failing, he would try the lash. She was no hound, to do his lordly bidding. He could go his way. She always had been sufficient to herself, from the days of Bernie Lennox down. There was no reason that the fact of Clode's crossing the plane of her own orbit should upset all her formulæ of living.

Then, all at once, the stiffening collapsed, and an even deeper red covered the ebbing colour in her cheeks. Down in her secret heart, she knew that Clode's coming into her life had upset all her earlier formulæ, had recast them into new ones, adding to their former A and B a C of disproportionate magnitude. She also knew that, from the present time onward, the supreme gift of self-sufficiency had been taken from her. Her book slid to the floor, and lay there. Rising, she crossed to the rail and stood leaning on it, her chin in her palms, her fingers cupping upward to shield her face from any watchful eyes. In those few moments, Aileen Warburton drank to the dregs the bitter cup of absolute loneliness, the sense that comes to every unmarried woman now and then of being an isolated human fact, and not a factor in the grand total of universal life.

She was roused by Grieg's voice in her ears. Turning, she found his trim figure, his strong, contented face, waiting at her side.

"You are meditating on our lost storm, Miss Warburton?" he asked her.

Instantly she rose to the new social need. Indeed, it would have been little short of the brutal, she told herself, to have inflicted her bad mood on Grieg in his wonderful new happiness. Despite the tales told out of Eden, women were not put into the world to add to the total of man's woe.

"No. I am thinking about the glorious news you told me, yesterday," she answered promptly.

"Is n't it good?" Grieg said.

She liked the terse little phrase. On Grieg's lips, it was stronger than whole paragraphs of raptures from another man. She liked the fact, too. Aileen was generous. Because her own world was going all awry, she saw only the more reason to rejoice in another's satisfaction. Good gifts, withheld from her, lost nothing of their value, when she saw them in Grieg's hands. And Grieg deserved all the good that was coming to him. She could not look into his face, and doubt that fact.

"Tell me about it; that is, if you are willing," she urged him.

And Grieg, his quiet eyes on her face, answered readily. Trustworthy himself, he saw no cause to distrust the reality of her interest which, indeed, was so frank and so hearty as to be past all denying.

"There's not so much to tell; that is, not to an outsider," he said, with a boyish directness that sat upon him well. "Of course, to us it is the most wonderful story in all creation; there never has been one like it." Then he smiled, and his strong face

lighted as if he gazed upon some holy vision. "In fact, I can't half grasp the wonder of it now, can't realize that we belong to each other, for all the eternities to come."

His eyes were fixed on Aileen's face, and, under the pressure of his emotion, his voice rose slightly. Clode, passing by, could hear his final words quite plainly. He had come back to the deck, more than a little penitent for his late bad manners, more than a little anxious to impress that penitence upon Aileen. He found Aileen leaning on the rail, with Grieg beside her. He overheard Grieg's words. He went his lonesome way, unnoticed by either one of the two people he had counted on as friends. His ash-grey head bent forward, his eyes upon the deck, he made the circuit of the ship, passed Molly and Price, now wrangling merrily about *Deuce*, passed them unseeing, and went on through the doorway and down the stairs, to hide himself, like any other wounded creature, in his bed.

Grieg, meanwhile, had roused himself to the practical, and was pouring into Aileen's ears all the chronology of his romance.

"Of course, I've known Bernie always," he said; "but I'd never met his family until last year, when I went on leave. It was in the spring, of course; I went out to the Riviera, for a change, for it was too cold for England. I found them all there: Mrs. Lennox and Bernie and the two girls, and Margaret. They all were nice girls; but, from the start, I could n't seem to see any of them but Margaret. Really, she's wonderful; hair the colour of yours, and great blue eyes, and a dainty little figure,

light as down. And such a laugh!" He paused for breath.

"Like Bernie's?" Aileen asked incautiously.

Grieg looked up sharply.

"You know him?"

Aileen reddened. The day had long passed that she had felt any self-consciousness where Bernie Lennox was concerned. Nevertheless, she would have preferred not to obtrude the incident just now, especially to Grieg.

"I did, once on a time," she answered carelessly.

"I fancied Mr. Clode might have told you."

She knew her man. Grieg was large enough to hold two enthusiasms at once. He promptly followed the trail that she had opened for him.

"That's one great thing about Clode," he told Aileen. "He never discusses people much."

"No?" Aileen had an instant of wishing that Clode had discussed her. Whatever the manners of it, gossip presupposes interest.

"No, never. I've seen a good deal of him, one way or another, since he came on board. He never talks about people; other people, or himself. In fact, all I know about him, I've had by way of Bernie Lennox. Queer you should have known Bernie! You knew Margaret, too? No? I wish you had. But, as for Clode, of course his talk has given me no end of side lights on his character. All in all, I've never met a finer man."

Aileen smiled rather faintly.

"You still keep up to your old verdict?" she said.

Grieg faced her.

"Don't you?" he asked. Then, mercifully, he went on without waiting for an answer. "Clode is all man, all human. And, Miss Warburton, after what we've seen him going through, this week, you and I must realize that we are fortunate to have him count us for his friends. A man who can suffer for a dead friend as Clode is doing, can go to almost any lengths of sacrifice, to help one who's alive."

And Aileen bowed her head assentingly. Grieg could not know that she also bowed it, in order that her sudden rush of scalding tears might be hidden from his keen and happy eyes.

Meanwhile, alone in his cabin, Clode was sitting on the edge of his bed, his shoulders hunched together, his chin upon his chest, following with haggard eyes the motion of his toe, idly tracing, tracing, tracing the pattern of the carpet.

At last, he raised his head, threw back his shoulders. Well, the game was up. He was irrevocably beaten. In all his life up to now, no other game had counted half so much. In all his future life, no other game, after this, would ever count for much to him. He had meant to play it fairly, strongly, to a victorious finish. But he was beaten hopelessly, beaten by a better man than he, by a younger man, more genial, infinitely more human in all his points of contact.

He hoped that they would be very —

Then his sincerity balked and threw him. As yet, he had not come to that. One can be a stoic, long before one gets to be a generous-minded optimist.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

"Clode, you're looking seedy."

Clode looked up. Grieg's pleasant voice was in his ears, Grieg's kindly hand was on his shoulder.

"Am I?"

"Yes, for a fact. Aren't you well?"

Clode roused himself. He had been purposely late at dinner, that night. Caviar and mushrooms, unmitigated by conversation, do not tend to lighten human gloom. Nevertheless, Grieg was the sort of man who made his companions realize instinctively that gloom spelt crime.

"Perfectly. It's possible that I was letting myself get bored and, what's a degree worse, letting my neighbour discover the fact."

Grieg's hand became insistent in its pressure.

"Bored? That's bad. But I was looking for you for a special reason. Come to my cabin. I've something I want to tell you."

Clode braced himself swiftly. He received the invitation with outward calm, but the calmness told on his reserve forces. It is hard, sometimes, to be a man. He had spent the past twenty-four hours in nerving himself to face the inevitable. He had not yet reached the point, however, where he felt able to face the cheery discussion of it. He followed Grieg into his cabin, wearing the face of a man who goes to meet his doom. When he came

out again, two hours later, quite without realizing it, he was humming his favourite little theme, —

“ Mm hm mm hm mm kind the storm,
That drives us nearer home.”

It was four days, now, since it had come, unbidden, to his lips.

Once in Grieg's cabin, their cigars lighted and their heels lifted to the angle that makes for conversation, Grieg lost no time in coming to the point.

“ Brutal of me to take a man that's down and out, as audience for my raptures,” he observed, by way of preface.

Clode looked up sharply, spoke curtly.

“ How do you mean, down and out? ” he demanded.

Grieg looked over at him in surprise. It was the first time he had experienced the P. J. in Clode's manner.

“ You said you were bored, man. Besides,” his voice lowered; “ we all know you've been going through your bad times, just lately.”

Clode raised his brows irascibly. He had thought better of Grieg than this. Strange to say, for the moment he had forgotten Merton utterly. The nearer interest has power for the time being to blot out the more remote.

“ Yes? ”

The accent was biting. Grieg flushed. Then he controlled himself. Even a thoroughbred is liable to snarl a little, when one flicks him on the raw; and Grieg, seeing the effect of the Marconigram which it had been his ugly duty to deliver, could not doubt Clode's right to temporary instability of nerve.

Grieg made a fresh start. His earlier one had not been altogether promising.

"Fact is, Clode," he said, with a nonchalance which he was far from feeling; "I've shepherded you in here for the sake of demanding your congratulations."

"Yes," Clode said again; this time, though, his accent was not biting, only dull. Then, to delay even for an instant the announcement which he dreaded, he asked, "In matters nautical, or of the heart?"

Again Grieg flushed. It was not what he had counted on from Clode. However, he had gone too far now to draw back with any dignity. He came directly to the point, then, with a simplicity which did not fail to make its own impression, even on Clode's unquiet mind.

"I am engaged to be married," he said.

Clode's hands shut on his chair arms; and Grieg's eyes caught the sudden whitening of the knuckles.

"To?" Clode asked steadily.

"To Margaret Lennox, Bernie's cousin."

"Oh!"

It was not an exclamation, merely a short, gasping breath, the sort of breath a condemned criminal might draw, on hearing of his reprieve. Then Clode shut his lips for an instant, while he tightened his grip upon the chair arms. Only an instant later, he held out his hand.

"Congratulations, Grieg! I am delighted. I'm only hoping that she's one-tenth worthy of the man that she has won."

And then, while he moistened his dry lips, a little

of the wonted healthy colour came flowing back into his face.

When he finally emerged once more from the whirlpool of his thoughts, his hopes, his plans, Grieg was still talking. Clode's vagrant attention was caught by a random phrase.

"— the second to know it. Miss Warburton was the first, of course. A woman is so quick to understand."

"And she was, of course." Clode spoke with abrupt decision.

Grieg smiled at his own curly smoke-plume, as if it framed a portrait invisible to any eyes but his.

"Wonderful!" he assented. "I shall never forget it. I had n't meant to announce it yet; but yesterday's storm was too much for me. It got into my veins and made me wild. I felt as if I must have somebody to be happy with me, or I'd disgrace myself in the eyes of the whole ship. And she was happy with me. If it had been her own romance, she could n't have taken it more sweetly. She's not a common sort of woman, Clode. Next to Margaret, she is —"

Clode looked up expectantly.

"Well?"

"Queen," Grieg concluded, and his voice was earnest.

Then both men smoked in silence.

In common humanity, Clode could not go away till late. Absolute joy demands comradeship as much as does absolute grief. In neither extreme, are any of us quite sufficient to ourselves. Clode

longed to be alone, to grip his renewed hope, to hug it to his heart. Nevertheless, he sat by patiently for two long hours, listening as attentively as he could to Grieg's ecstatic outpourings of the spirit, the sort of outpourings that come from strong men just once in all their lives. It was a bit of a bore to listen; but Clode felt that he owed the sacrifice to the kindly Fate who had resurrected him into a living, joyous present. Moreover, he listened with the more patience because of his conviction that, in the place of Grieg, he would be quite as bad or, perchance, even worse.

At last, however, after Grieg's fourth narration of the details of the first day when the truth had dawned upon his consciousness, Clode permitted himself the luxury of a casual glance at his watch. Aileen, only a little later, heard the quiet clicking of his cabin door.

Once in his cabin and alone, Clode flung up his arms with the sudden gesture of a man freeing himself from galling fetters. Then he dropped down on the narrow seat before his window, clasped his hands around his knee, and remained there, erect, tense, and very thoughtful.

What next? Should he adhere to the promise he had given Aileen, months ago: the promise to hold himself in constant readiness and wait for her to speak the word electing him to be her mate? Or should he seek her arrogantly, arrogantly demand that she should give her woman's life into his keeping, now in this present and beyond all peradventure, and let the question of her readiness take care of itself? He had thought that he could count upon

his will to mould himself to worthiness, to mould her mind and heart to recognize the fact that he was worthy — in so far as any man could be worthy of such a woman as he had judged Aileen Warburton to be. He had felt that he was willing to risk the narrow chance of failure, rather than have her come to him with any secret reservations. In short, he had wished everything, given with the utmost freedom, or else nothing. The past four and twenty hours had made him doubt.

And yet? His word of honour? His promise? Or the bitter, bitter risk, for lack of yielding one atom of his will, that he might lose her utterly?

He fought the fight for hours, neither side abandoning one whit of its claim upon his judgment. Then, wearied to exhaustion, he flung himself down, to sleep upon his arms.

In the first raw greying of the dawn, Clode waked abruptly. Waking, he had a sudden consciousness that, to all seeming, the *Beatic* was endeavouring to stand upright on her propellers, while she used her bows, like the movable leg of mammoth compasses, to trace gigantic circles on the sky. He could hear the waters roaring by outside his window, could hear the gale come hurtling past him, not strident now, but in crashing lumps of wind, punctuated by intervals of whimpering silence, as if the torn air were crying in its pain. The elemental symphony of two days before had ended, and in its place was the din of battle, raging between the angry winds of heaven and the yet more angry sea.

Clode, luxuriously sheltered in his cabin, rocked like a puny baby in his mother's arms, listened to

the riotous din outside, drowsily at first, then with intentness, comprehension. The warring of his own desires had transferred itself to the elements outside. Wind and sea were in full shock of actual battle, the breath of the ideal, the plastic sea of actual achievement. And the finish of it all? The ending of the strife and storm? Neither wind nor sea would cease, and leave the other raging. Each must yield somewhat of the present stressful effort after mastery. And so, perhaps —

Suddenly, amid all the din, he heard his own little theme coming from his lips, not tentatively now, but with decision, —

“ Kind the storm
That drives us nearer home.”

Out of the storm had come the voice. He settled back upon his pillow, and clasped his arms above his head. Somewhere between here and the pierhead at New York, sometime between now and the hour of their landing, the next night, he would fling his promise to the winds, and take his manly right, his manly privilege, to repeat his question to Aileen and then completely overwhelm her hesitations by his insistence on the only answer he would ever deign to take. He was the man, the strong one and the dominant. He had the less right on this account to force her woman's strength to the ordeal of bridging chasms which parted him from the fruition of his desires. Her royal mate? His lip curled, as his mind dwelt for an instant on his earlier phrase. Arrogant! Arrogant! Rather let him humbly seek to be her slave.

He tossed restlessly to and fro, wedging the pillows into all manner of impossible lumps, twisting the blankets to the semblance of a flannel rope. Two hours and a half to breakfast! And no sane man, however exigent the need, would ask a critical favour of a woman on an empty stomach. No; he must lie still and wait, with what patience he was able, till Haydock came to tell him it was time to bath and dress. However, by way of putting his sensible decision into effect, he launched a terrific kick at the unoffending footboard. Then he looked at his watch again, held it to his ear in mute and reproachful question, then wound it up so sharply that he broke the mainspring. Clode smiled grimly to himself, as his fingers felt the snap. Served it right, for not making any better speed!

However, when breakfast time did come, and Clode, his head erect, his step alert, his pulses beating high, betook himself to the dining-room, Aileen was invisible. Haydock, interrogated later, was impenetrable. No; Miss Warburton was not ill, not in the least. She was only rather tired; and, it was such an impossible day to be on deck, she had decided to spend the morning, resting in her cabin.

In all truth, Aileen was tired, that day. The unrealized tension of all the past four months seemed to her to have reached a climax of strain that alternated swiftly between the distracting and the paralyzing. It was as though some force outside herself were driving her to an advance; but, whichever way she turned, some *If* beset her and blocked her passage utterly. In all truth, Aileen was tired. In all truth,

too, she needed rest, and quiet, and, above all, utter solitude. Else, how would she be able to pick her way through the tangled maze ahead of her? Certain named paths must be followed: womanliness, self-respect, generosity, honour. It needed careful study to make out in advance their points of intersection.

Early that morning, awakened by the two-fold shock of wind and sea, Aileen had risen and tapped on Molly's cabin door. Her memory of the last storm and of Molly's plucky fight against the demon of the sea rendered her a little nervous as to Molly's present fate. To Aileen, it was quite inconceivable that anybody could be sick in any sort of sea, inconceivable that a little thing like seasickness could justify the fuss that people made about it. Nevertheless, her conscience would not allow her to lie snug in bed, when Molly might be suffering torments, next door. Accordingly, she rose and sallied forth upon a journey of discovery.

To her relief, Molly's answer was prompt and cheerful.

"Yes? Come in."

Aileen opened the door and peeped in, ready for pity or for congratulation as the case might be. Molly's yellow hair spread out across the pillow framed a rosy, smiling face which gave the lie to any thought of sickness. Indeed, how could it well be otherwise? Happiness is bound to triumph, even in matters of digestion; and under Molly's pillow was a wireless message, sent from Cape Race and handed to her by Haydock, the last thing, the night before.

"Sailing to-day *Olympic* due second love Winterbourne."

And so it came about that Molly lay smiling at her aunt for one long, lazy, rapturous minute. Then she thrust one hand underneath her pillow and drew out the precious bit of paper hidden there.

"I thought I might as well tell you now," Molly remarked nonchalantly, after a proper interval of kissings and cuddlings and babblings of congratulation; "as wait until we get ashore. But what on earth, Auntie Aileen," her voice broke into a chuckle of pure girlish mirth; "will they say at home, when we walk in upon them, hand in hand, and simultaneously make confession of our tender secrets?"

Aileen suddenly grew very still. Then, —

"What do you mean, Molly?" she asked gently.

Her stillness was quite wasted upon Molly, who laughed out buoyantly.

"Why, Mr. Winterbourne and me," she answered; "and you and Mr. Grieg."

"Molly!"

This time, Molly sobered. Indeed, it was not possible to ignore the mingling of wrath and of vague terror which had come into her aunt's grey eyes. Instantly the girl spoke out her prompt young penitence.

"Oh, Auntie Aileen, I'm so sorry! I ought to have known better; but I'm so happy, myself, that I went off my head. Of course, I had n't any business to say a word about it, one way or the other, until you told me."

Aileen laid a reassuring hand upon Molly's shoul-

der, in token of forgiveness; but her gravity increased.

"About what, Molly?"

"About your engagement to Mr. Grieg."

"Molly! What can have given you such an absurd idea?" Aileen demanded sternly.

Molly stared up at her aunt in total stupefaction.

"But Mr. Grieg told me, himself," she said slowly.

"Impossible! You misunderstood him, Molly. Mr. Grieg never meant you to dream of such a thing."

Molly ransacked the corners of her memory, brought out the bits she found there.

"He did, Auntie Aileen. Listen! It was on deck, the other day. I found him looking as if he owned the universe and was standing on the top of it, gazing down into heaven. I asked him why he looked so happy, and he grew as red and self-conscious as could be, and finally told me to ask you. Then he went away; but I ran after him and poured out my congratulations. He was glad to get them, too."

And then, to Molly's vast surprise, her aunt burst out laughing.

"Molly, you imaginative little sinner! Next time, you'd better do as you are told, and ask me. Mr. Grieg probably was glad to be congratulated; he had just been telling me of his engagement to a Miss Margaret Lennox."

Molly echoed the laugh, with a keen enjoyment of her own absurdity. Then she stretched her lithe young figure to its fullest length, and settled back luxuriously among the pillows.

"Well," she said cosily; "I've made a huge mis-

take; but it has n't done any especial harm. It really might be any amount worse; but, as it happens, I have n't said a word about it to anybody on board but Mr. Clode."

"Mr. Clode!" Aileen's voice sounded smothered.

"Yes. I met him just after, and he was going to laugh at me for making such a fuss over Mr. Grieg, so I told him all about it," Molly made tranquil explanation. "It's lucky it was he, though, and not anybody else. He won't pass it on, and I can easily —"

And then Molly stopped short, in utter consternation.

"Oh, Molly, Molly!" Aileen was saying sobbingly. "What have you done? What have you done?"

It was not until well on towards evening that Aileen mastered a little of the tumult of her thoughts. All day long, she had denied herself to every one save Haydock; all day long, she had persistently shut her eyes to the simplest course of exit from the misunderstanding born of Molly's words, the sending Molly to unsay them. To Aileen, they seemed irrevocable. That was the woman of her. All day long, once her first outburst of utter woe had spent itself, she had lain there, dull, indifferent, listening to the crashing of the storm which seemed to her scarcely more audible than the crashing of the fabric of her life, listening to the clang of the ship's bell, tolling, not the hours alone, but the dirge of all her hopes. Now and then she tried to rouse herself to face — what? Merely the irrevocable. That was all.

Even now that Molly's careless blunder had taken away all chances of Clode's renewing his earlier plea,

even now that the result of that blunder was teaching Aileen with hideous clearness how blank her after life would be, if Clode were not at hand to share it with her: even now, she could not face the alternative of going to him and telling him quite simply that Molly was mistaken, that she herself was not engaged to Grieg, that she still was free, and — There lay the rub. That *And* held endless implications quite alien to the habits of her woman's mind and tongue. Rather than face them to their finish, she let herself sink back again to utter apathy.

As the afternoon waned, however, and the night came on, the partial stilling of the storm outside brought a like stilling to her troubled spirit, where, all day long, there had raged the battle between convention and humanity. In the stillness, there came to her, sharp and clear, the surety that, in the end of all, humanity was bound to down convention, even to the point of casting aside her womanly reserves, her pride of reticence, and speaking out to Clode the downright truth of her aching need of him.

To be sure, all of her instincts lay against such a course, all of her inherited traditions, all of her training. These, one and all, insisted loudly that it was the woman's part to wait in passive silence; that it was the woman's lot to go down to the grave, if need be, desolate and alone, rather than speak one single word, rather than raise one little finger to prevent this desolation, even though she was well aware it was bound to ravage another life besides her own. Such reticence was womanly; such passivity was truly feminine.

All day long, the three of them: instincts, traditions, training, had held Aileen Warburton in their iron-bound grip. When she struggled to throw them off, their pressure merely increased so much the more, until it numbed her. Their insistent iterations deafened her mind to every opposing argument; most violently of all, they sought to drown out the one really weighty argument that Clode had told her of his love, had begged her to become his wife, had assured her by everything that made his manly honour, that, for the future, he should stand by, quiet, waiting the inevitable hour of her capitulation. And now the three of them: instinct, tradition, training, were proclaiming ceaselessly and shrilly that such capitulation would be unwomanly. It was for the man to force surrender, not await it.

And then, all at once, Aileen's human common sense forced itself, unannounced, into the arena, and flung down the gauntlet of a dozen pithy questions. Summed up, the questions reduced themselves to two. Did she love Clode and need him, as he had said he loved and needed her? Was it worse to be unfeminine and to come forward frankly with a belated answer to an honest, earnest question; or, by her womanly reticence, to cast two lives into a barren desolation which must endure for both of them — she knew it now — till the remotest end of time?

Answering the questions honestly, she buried her hot cheeks in the pillow, dreading, yet aching for, the morrow which would bring her, not to a capitulation, a yielding of her woman's holiest standards, but to the generous fruition of her life.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

SIMPLY as a little child, next morning, breakfast over, Aileen went to find the purser. At the finish of her request, —

“I want always to remember to-day, please,” she explained, still very simply. “That is why I asked.”

A little later, she went up on deck, loitered irresolutely for a minute and then went forward to the bows. There she halted, leaning on the rail, and stared out, wide-eyed, past the smart young officers upon the bridge, past the foremast, out and out across the sunny sea, blue as the sky above it, but still breathing deeply with the fresh memory of its mighty storm. Two ships upon the southerly horizon, a long, low stretch of island upon the north: these showed that home was now almost in sight. And between here and home — ?

Stanway, inside the lounge and busy with some letters, looked up and saw her standing alone in the sunny angle of the bow. His letters lost their interest; he hesitated, laid down his pen and picked it up again. Then, thrusting his half-finished letters into his pocket, he rose and went to join her.

She glanced up, as she heard his approaching footstep, and her colour came and went uncertainly. Then her face lighted at the accent of his greeting. Once again, her admiration of him quickened. Minor poet or no, human platitude or no, Stanway was

yet too broad a man at heart to let himself grow bitter in his disappointment. It was forty-eight hours, now, since she had been in speaking distance of him. From his aloofness, she had expected that he would be peevish, or openly aggrieved, when at last they met. Instead, he met her much in the old way; the old way, that is, with a new deference added, as if in token of his realization that, for him, she would always be unreachable.

Not that Stanway put this into words, however. He was too clever to do anything so banal, so obvious. It was in his voice, his hesitating gestures, above all in his eyes. His words, though, were absolutely commonplace.

"Good-morning, Miss Warburton. Did you ever know such a sudden change in the sea?"

"Never." She keyed her answer carefully to his. "It is always a mystery to me where the storms hide themselves so quickly."

His eyes met hers with the glance of comprehension, which never failed to be struck out of their common love of the sea.

"The Country of Vanished Storms?" he queried. "What a corner of the universe it would be! You'd get your fill of rocking and creaking there, I fancy. But did n't I hear that even you were bowled over, yesterday?"

She judged it wiser not to contradict the rumour. After all, it was a simpler explanation than the true one.

"I hope you were properly sorry for me," she responded.

Stanway made a little grimace of disgust.

"I was too busy being sorry for myself. After we calmed down a little, I spent no end of time wondering what sort of a fee it took to muzzle Haydock. He told me you were spending the day below; but he insisted that you were not seasick in the least, only tired. In fact, the old sinner did his best to make me believe that he had tried to tempt your appetite with a welsh rabbit for your luncheon."

Aileen changed the subject hastily.

"Where are we now?" she queried.

"We passed 'Sconset Light at six, they say; that is Long Island over there. We ought to dock, tonight."

Her fingers shut on the rail before her. There was so much for her to do, before they docked, so much, and yet, after all, such a very little, little thing, if one measured it by time.

"Are you glad, or sorry?" Stanway was asking her.

She looked up, startled. Had he been reading her thoughts, reading her final, inevitable drawing back before her resolution?

"About?"

"That the voyage is ending?"

"Sorry," she answered slowly. "I always love the sea; now, after seeing it at its best, I shall miss it more than ever. But, after all, the voyage has brought me nearly all the pleasure I can assimilate just now. One needs a little time to get the best out of things, even of enjoyment." She had been leaning on the rail, while she was speaking, her chin in her hands and her grey eyes fixed upon the sea.

Now, after a little pause, she looked up suddenly, frankly, and, stripping off her glove, held out her hand. "Mr. Stanway," she said, with the brave directness of a boy; "one of the best things about it all has come, this morning."

"And that?" he questioned; but he made no motion to take her outstretched hand.

"The surety that we are able to keep on as we used to be, just good friends," she told him dauntlessly, her grey eyes smiling straight up into his.

For just one instant, the grey eyes saw the dark ones above them glitter wetly; then, too generous to be anything but sorry for what they had seen, they dropped to rest upon the sea. An instant afterward, Stanway's fingers crushed Aileen's in a nervous grip.

"Thank you," he said. "Even so much makes it all worth while."

Aileen spoke; but not until their hands had swung apart once more.

"It is nearly time for church," she told him gently. "Would you be willing to look up Molly, and tell her not to wait for me? I may be a bit late about going down."

And Stanway, recognizing his dismissal, bowed silently and went away.

Alone in the sunny corner of the bow, Aileen waited, waited until the deep-toned ship's bell gave the hour, waited until, faintly from three decks below, there came to her listening ears the strains of the prelude by the orchestra. Then, for one minute, heedless of watching eyes from lounge or bridge, Aileen bowed her head in wordless prayer for

strength and guidance, for, above all else, unselfishness. And, mingling faintly with her prayer, as if in heaven-sent answer, the song of the violins came stealing to her softly above the whispering, silky sea.

"Wait patiently," they sang; "and He shall give thee thy heart's desires."

And then, with one final bit of prayer for the ennobling of her desire, as well as for its fulfilment, Aileen turned her back upon the sunny sea, upon the upward-pointing foremast, upon the bridge, symbol of the guidance for which she had but now been praying, turned away and went downstairs.

At the head of the final flight, she came on Clode, waiting there since breakfast, waiting for this very meeting, and for all which would, which was bound to, follow. His keen eyes softened, and he bowed his ash-grey head, as Aileen came down towards him, dressed in the familiar frock of dusky blue, but wearing in her face an unfamiliar look of exaltation. So might the dear Madonna have borne herself, it seemed to him, when she came out from receiving the message of the angel.

Without a word of any sort, Aileen held out her hand in greeting, then beckoned him to follow her down the stairs. Inside the door, he hesitated; but she beckoned to him yet again, this time to take the vacant seat beside her. And, this time, she smiled. The conscious pride of womanhood had left her; for the hour, she was an humble little child.

Always, afterwards, that service was printed indelibly on both their minds. To the others of the congregation gathered there, it was just church.

To Clode and Aileen, it was a solemn rite of sacrifice; each of them, albeit unsuspected by the other, was laying his new-born resolution on the unseen altar to await a blessing from above.

And the service went the way of other services. Outside, beneath the open ports, the sunny waters murmured in reverent contentment in their renewed peace. Inside, behind his book opened above the outspread Union Jack, the purser rose to read the prayers and lessons. Clearly and reverently, his voice dwelt on the ancient phrases, ever vital, never hackneyed:

*High and mighty King of kings, Lord of lords,
the only Ruler of princes.*

And again:

*Who alone spreadest out the heavens, and rulest
the raging of the sea.*

The listening congregation stirred a little at the finish, stirred with the slight, appreciative murmur that one bestows even upon a religious service, when it is well done. But Aileen and Clode waited, motionless, until the benediction should bring to them its final blessing. As they rose from their knees and stood there, side by side, Aileen caught her breath sharply and shut her teeth upon her lip, perchance to steady it.

But the purser, after all, was only giving out the hymn.

The purser had chosen to hold it to the last, fit climax to the reverent service, fit climax to the whole grand crossing of the wintry sea. The orchestra

gave out the warning chord; the choir of uniformed stewards rose and massed themselves on either side the purser whose medalled coat bore witness that life, for him, had not been wholly spent on summer seas. And then it came, the hymn of hymns for shipboard, glorious and unforgettable; came thrilling and throbbing out from the violins, across the waiting silence of the room, straight to Aileen Warburton who had chosen it for this, her dedicated hour.

“Eternal Father, strong to save.”

The violins sang it first, sang it with a reverence which culminated in the final prayer,—

“O hear us when we cry to Thee
For those in peril on the sea.”

An instant later came the voices of the stewards, untrained perhaps, a little harsh it may be, but ringing out with a complete sincerity that told of the years and the storms which had brought home to them the real meaning of the words they sang.

“Who bidd’st the mighty ocean deep
Its own appointed limits keep.”

Aileen was singing now with all her heart and soul, unconscious as a child of all around her, save of the hymn, and of the man standing at her side. She could not see his face without turning; but the book was shaking slightly in his unsteady fingers, and, every now and then, his deep voice missed a note and failed him utterly.

Long before the hymn was finished, Clode was

driven to silence; but Aileen sang on to the end, happy, exultant, trusting as a little child.

“From rock and tempest, fire and foe,
Protect them wheresoe’er they go;
Thus evermore shall rise to Thee
Glad hymns of praise from land and sea.
Amen.”

But Aileen’s lashes were wet, as she turned to Clode.

“Don’t you want to come up to the top deck for a bit of a walk?” she asked him bravely.

He nodded. He dared not trust himself to speak. Her sudden yielding to his unspoken wishes, her unexpected anticipation of his own intended request of her: these had dazzled and dazed his senses. And always there was the unaccountable new radiance in her face. For a little, Clode knew he would best be silent. Once he began to speak, it would not be too easy to place any limit to his words.

And Aileen, too, as they went up the stairs, was silent. She knew that her hour was come. She faced it bravely, steadily, almost joyously. Indeed, what was it that Stanway had quoted to her, while the *Beatic* was dropping slowly out into the Mersey?

“Joy, Shipmate! Joy!
For now the long, long anchorage we leave!”

And yet, despite the joy, the anchor cleaves a little to the sheltering sand.

Once on the top deck, however, the breeze on her cheeks and the blue sea stretching out around her,

speech came back to Aileen, the nervous, restless speech which one uses as a buffer to ward off some approaching crisis. She talked about the sunshiny morning in contrast to the storm of yesterday. She talked about the *Beatic*, and the curiously personal appeal it seemed to make to all on board. She began to talk of Molly; but, remembering Winterbourne and his bearing on the present situation, she fell silent. She started to talk of Grieg, and recollected the fact of Margaret Lennox. She undertook to talk of Stanway; but she bethought herself of certain of their recent conversations. Finally she fell back on Haydock, and talked about him with the comfortable certainty that he would never lead her on to dangerous ground. Haydock, as a subject, proved to be durable. By the time that he was wearing a little thin, Price, his cheese-green livery changed to a mouldy yellow, appeared in the offing, and Aileen hailed him eagerly. Moment by moment, the throbbing of her pulses became more suffocating; yet she was conscious of a restless wish to prolong the smother to infinity, rather than speak out and end it once for all.

Price, his sea legs much in evidence after the storm of the day before, came stubbing down the deck to meet them.

"We'll be in dock, to-night," he told them ruefully. "I'm going the rounds to say my good-byes to all the old corners. It's harder to do it than it generally is to turn your back upon a chum. It's a great old ship, and it's been a great old holiday; but the ending has to come. So long! See you before we land." And Price, his perkiness

fast vanishing, went stubbing onward in his sentimental round.

Clode looked after him with kindly eyes.

"He's a good little beggar," he said. And then he echoed, "But the ending has to come."

Aileen caught her breath. Then, —

"Or the beginning," she said.

Her voice was nothing but the merest whisper. Low as it was, however, Clode caught her words. Flame blazed up in his eyes, and his hand moved, as if to shut on Aileen's, dangling by her side. Then, with an effort, he curbed himself.

"You mean?" he asked her, and the quality of his manhood showed in his level accent. It asked for nothing, took nothing for granted.

Then she faced him, and the light in her grey eyes dazzled him completely.

"Mr. Clode," she reminded him steadily; "one day, last August, when we stood together up here, you —" Her voice failed her.

"Aileen!" Clode's voice was so hoarse as to be well-nigh unrecognizable.

The pride of generations spoke in the sharp rally that she made.

"Wait!" she bade him. "It is my turn to speak; my time. I told you then that it would never come; but now I know I was mistaken. First, though, there is one question."

He lifted his eyes to hers in mute reproach; but she disregarded the reproach.

"It is my right to ask it, the only right I have," she told him, with a bravery of whose greatness he could grasp only the merest edges; "the rest shall

be my privilege. Mr. Clode," again her conscious pride fell from her; she faced him now in all the simple majesty of womanhood; "do you still feel as you did, that day; still wish —"

Clode took a step forward.

"Can you doubt it, Aileen?" he asked impetuously.

But her lifted hand held him back.

"Remember that the time has come for simple truth," she warned him. "Better be a little cruel now, than merciless for all the time to come."

He bowed his head.

"Upon my honour," he said gravely. "I do not feel as I did then, Aileen. I know now, I have learned, that without you my life would be ten times more desolate than, at that time, I had ever dreamed it could be."

Again she lifted her hand; this time, though, she let it fall back irresolutely. Turning, she faced out to the sea, as if she begged the God of the Waters to send her strength.

"Mr. Clode," she said at last, her eyes still on the sea; "I was selfish, that day, selfish and a little arrogant. I am not sorry, though; not sorry that I waited. Since then, I have learned to know myself much better. I liked you then; but I liked the thing I called my freedom more. I know now that what I used to call my freedom was, in reality, my selfishness. I wished to go on, taking everything and giving nothing back again. I wished to pose, alone, on tiptoe at the apex of my world; I wanted to have all the rest of the inhabitants prostrate around me. But, —" her mood changed swiftly; a faint smile

broke in upon the earnestness suffusing her grey eyes; "but, Carl, after I knew you, I found that my old place was very lonely. I need you to stand beside me, to steady me, perhaps to guide me. We women stumble, when we try to walk too far alone. Carl," and now, turning suddenly, she held out both her hands; "will you come?"

He took her hands in his, bowed his ash-grey head above them.

"To your feet, dearest, if I may."

She looked up at him through her shining tears.

"No, Carl; not that. And not even as — what did you ask? — my royal mate. Instead, I want you for," and one great tear, round as a perfect pearl, fell down and gemmed his finger as she spoke; "my King."

THE END

11





